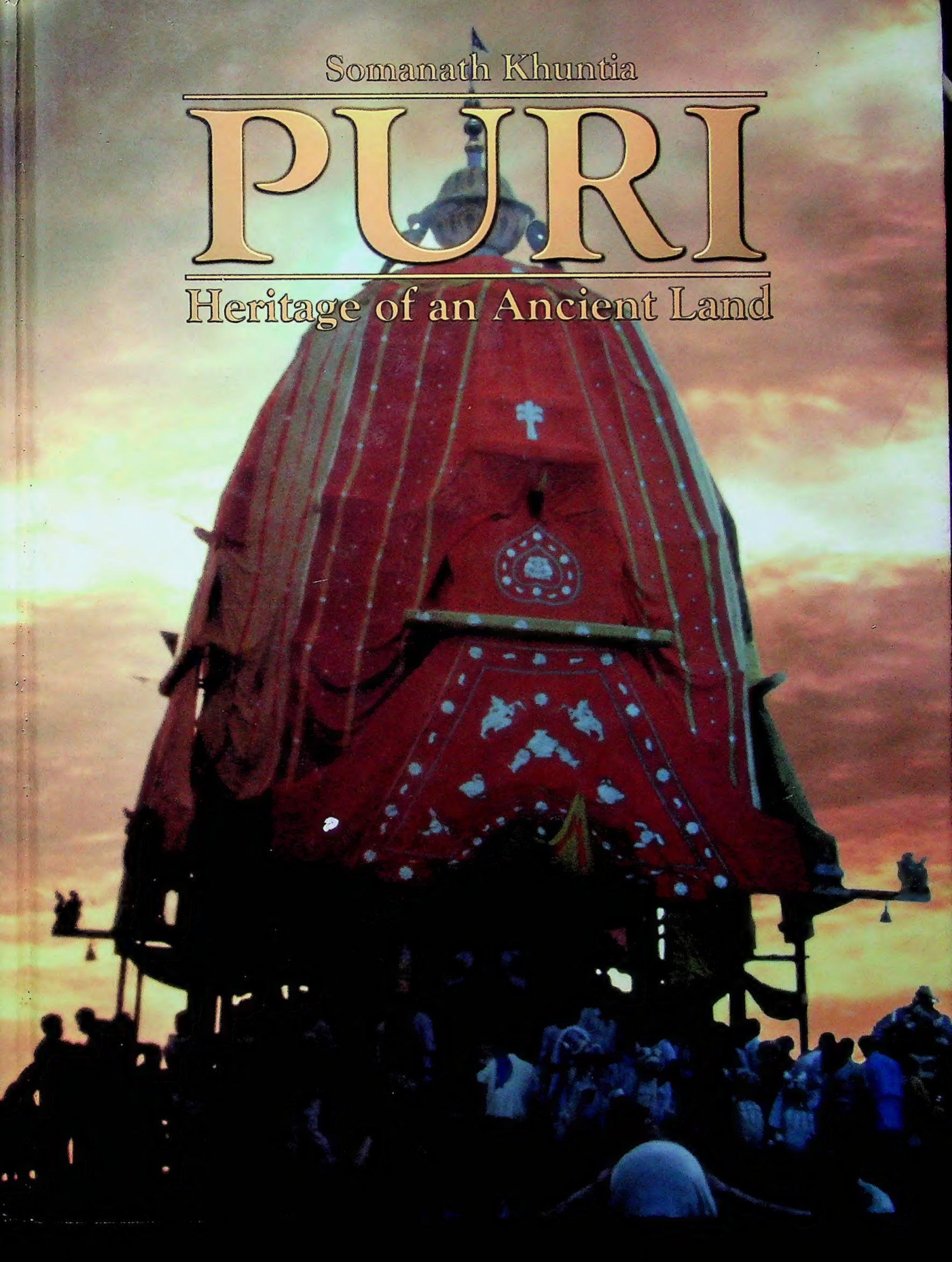


Somanath Khuntia

# PURI

Heritage of an Ancient Land

















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Heritage of an Ancient Land

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vedic cultural association publishing  
LOS ANGELES



Cover & First page : *An old lady pays her deep respect to Lord Jagannath during Rath Yatra, the great Car Festival of Puri. The deities remain outside for nine days to give darshan to all*

Page 2-3 :

*"Oh tired mind,  
Let us go to Puri."*

*So sang the great Muslim poet Salebega.  
Sea Beach of Puri at sunset draws people from all over India and abroad as well. To take bath in the ocean at Puri is both spiritual and healthful.*

Page 4: *Jagannath Temple at night. On DEVA DIPAVALI the temple is actually lit up with more than 5,000 small lamps, called Dipas.*

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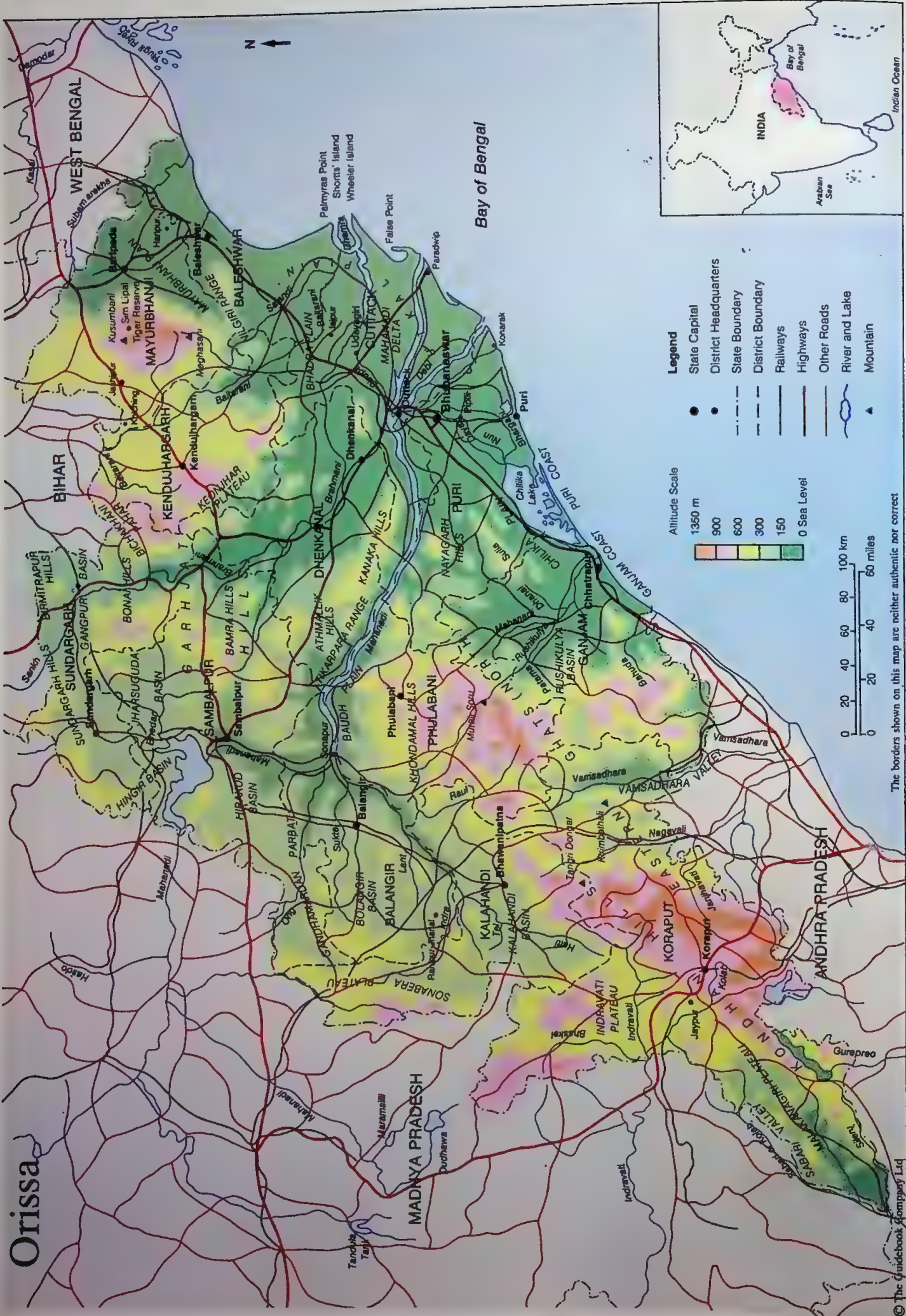
LOKA SAMASTA SUKHINO BHAVANTU

May all people be happy.

*Offered  
at the divine lotus feet  
of  
Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba  
who has come  
to teach the world that  
God is one.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS - Young people often think a good thing to be ordinary and insignificant. That is why good things are rare today. I tell this in connection with my father when he taught me slokas and old traditions. At that time I thought this was fruitless and a waste of time. But now I am aware that what my father said was good, better, and best. I feel that he lives on through these precious traditions. He speaks to me now more in death than when alive and is walking through every page of this book. If this rich heritage is transferred to my sons and daughters, and all future generations of Puri, their lives will be equally blessed. So I also wish to offer this book to the memory of my father, Baba.







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# FOREWORD

“MANILE DEVATA NA MANILE PATHARA.”

“If you think it to be a stone,  
It remains a stone.  
If you think it is God,  
It will become God for you!”

It was 2:30 in the morning and by the light of a dim flashlight, I sneaked out of the hotel lobby and made my way to the waiting bicycle rickshaw outside. Perhaps it was all predestined, as people of the temple town of Jagannath Puri would say. I climbed onto the seat, with an extra sari in hand.

Some fifteen minutes later we reached the back side of the great Jagannath Temple where the community of worshippers live. Thirty ladies were waiting in a small group. We were to take a sea bath together in the early hours of the dawn on this most auspicious morning of GOVINDA DWADASHI. I was told that the configuration of planets on this day occurs only once every 400 years and is especially fortunate.

DWADASHI means “the number 12.” Besides his beloved consort Radha, there were 12 gopis very dear to Sri Krishna. Many times Krishna invited them to come to the Yamuna River with Him to take bath. But they all refused, out of reserve as good ladies. However, they gradually became so devoted to the Lord that they totally identified with Him and themselves begged Sri Krishna to come with them for bath in Yamuna River.

On that particular day there occurred a special configuration of planets. So it is called GOVINDA DWADASHI in memory of the fulfillment of the wish of the twelve gopis.

It is said that if one takes bath in a holy place on this day, one will also have her wish fulfilled and merge with God as the gopis did.

Thus, the meeting with the author of this book occurred. He and his family “adopted” me, so to



speak, into their extended temple family. How well I fared in the sea bath I only vaguely remember. I could swim, but the other 29 temple ladies could not, so we approached the ocean in mass, holding each other's hands in a long queue. Afterwards, on the beach, we changed into clean dry saris, and this I do remember vividly. I tied my wet petticoat to my dry one and could not untangle the mess in public!

That event occurred some ten years ago. This book on the heritage of Puri may best be read as a collection of reminiscences of the author on the life and culture of this ancient holy place. We would sit in the evenings on the seaside verandah of my little bungalow and he would answer my queries about the habits and customs of the people I met here. It is these informal conversations we have recorded in this book.

I leave it to the reader to accept what he feels appealing, or reject what he feels is too outlandish and strange. After all, customs themselves are a matter of taste. As for myself, I have spent the greater part of my life in mother India, and particularly in this holy peaceful temple town of Jagannath Puri, in the northeastern state of

Orissa, on the beautiful banks of the Bay of Bengal. I can only say that out of gratitude for this rare opportunity, I pray, as an Oriya saying tells,

"RUNA NA SUJILE BADIADÉ,  
BAIGANA GACHHA HOI SUJIBI !"

"May I be reborn as an eggplant in your garden!"  
Such kindness cannot be repaid in this lifetime.

Elizabeth Burnett  
Photographer







# CULTURE AND CONSCIOUSNESS

The Sanskrit word SANSKRITI is commonly rendered into English as "culture." But this does not properly suggest its deep implications. If one is a connoisseur of fine wines and has travelled the world over, and has published many books, or is an excellent speaker, he may be considered "cultured" in the West. But in the Indian way of thinking, he may or may not have SANSKRITI.

To understand what is meant by SANSKRITI, we must relate it to two other Sanskrit words, PRAKRUTI and BIKRUTI. PRAKRUTI is "nature," or more explicitly, "one's own nature." All activities done to satisfy one's physical nature are termed PRAKRUTI. When we are hungry, we must eat. After this conversation tonight, we will eat. Isn't it so? This nature we share with all other animals in God's creation. But only man has BIKRUTI and SANSKRITI.

By BIKRUTI we mean "that which is unnatural." Only man eats when he is not hungry, and even kills to do so. Because of this excessive desire and excessive waste, the ecological systems of the world are suffering from extreme imbalance today. In the words of the great French writer Proust, man's journey of discovery begins not with new vistas to conquer but with having new eyes with which to behold them.

Thus, SANSKRITI must be cultivated in order to save the world from disaster. SANS means "without," and KRITI refers to one's own personal nature. All those activities of man that are without personal self-interest are called SANSKRITI. When a poor man is given food after going hungry for days and then gives that food to another, such as a dying old mother, that is SANSKRITI.

*Opposite: All people coming to Puri must cross over Atharanala Bridge as they enter the holy temple town.*







SANSKRITI has nothing to do with the amount of formal education one has, or the range of talents, or the number of fancy items prepared for the daily meal, as tonight we are eating a fancy dish called "Chilly Paneer." SANSKRITI comes only from an expansion of consciousness. Perhaps the best definition of SANSKRITI is "that awareness that binds and unites one with another."

Man is always wishing to experience peace and harmony. But to actually do so, he must be interested in seeing only good things. For this to happen, man's higher nature, or SANSKRITI, must be cultivated. Otherwise, as we say in Orissa,

"ANDHA GRAMARE  
EKA AKHIA RAJA."

"There is a dark village, and the king is one-eyed!"

Nothing better reflects the SANSKRITI of Orissa than Oriya poetry and songs. Even though tape recorders and radios are common today, (my sons all have them), people still prefer to sing their own favorite songs in their homes while cooking or at bhajan time in the evening,\* or on street corners while waiting for a bus, or while sitting on a train.

All the great poet singers of Orissa draw their inspiration from the same source, God, whom they refer to here as JAGANNATH, meaning "Lord of the universe," and the great Jagannath Temple of Puri.

"KIESE GADHILAA,

*Opposite: To lead the CHANDAN YATRA procession in the spring, local people decorate themselves as Nanda, the foster father of Sri Krishna, and the cowherd boy Krishna with Radha.*

SUNDARA SANSARA.  
KEUNTHARE LUCHIRAH.  
KIESE BINDHANI,  
BICHITRA KARANI."  
TA PARI ANYA KE NAHIN."

In this popular modern-day Oriya devotional song, the poet Baikuntha Nath Brahmachari reflects,

"Who has built this beautiful world,  
And where is He hidden?  
He is the best carpenter.  
He alone is to be praised.  
There is no one like Him!"

A yogi living in an ashram, the poet continues,

"Who has made the deer so nicely spotted,  
And the crow so black?  
Who has given all the flowers  
Their gorgeous colors,  
And painted the sweet smile on a  
baby's lips?  
And where is He hidden?"

One must understand this basic fact about Orissan culture. In Puri poetry and religion are one and the same thing, and they have been passed down through the centuries by learned and unlearned alike.

My father never had formal education; he even had trouble signing his own name. But he taught me one sloka per day that I had to recite in a loud voice from memory before eating. He listened downstairs from the puja room!

Not only ancient Vedic slokas, but all forms of SANSKRITI are conceived here as an offering to God. So this dedication must be both beautiful in form and content. Like the food offered in the temple, after offering, it takes on a different taste. Words become sweeter, melodies more delicate, and feelings deeper and more subtle. Perhaps

\* Bhajans are devotional songs to God.



this sweetness and subtlety mark the quintessence of all art and culture in Orissa and separate it as unique and distinct from all the other art forms of India and the world as well.

The original BHAGAVATA, describing the divine childhood pastimes of Sri Krishna, was written in Sanskrit by Vyasadeva in ancient times. But the Oriya version written centuries later (in the 15th century) by Jagannath Das (1487-1547) adds exquisite lines of poetry and melody in NAVAKSHARI style, that is, each line contains only nine syllables. Simple and easy to sing, it allowed the common man to enjoy contemplation on these divine stories, not just Sanskrit pandits.

My father knew whole passages of BHAGAVATA by heart and used to sing it for one hour daily in the early hours of dawn. Every night BHAGAVATA can be heard from loudspeakers in mathas along the Grand Road of Puri, and in every neighborhood of the temple community and villages, there is a BHAGAVATA house, where it is recited nightly also.

"BRAHMANDA MALA MALA HOI,  
TA LOMAKUPE JHULU THAI."

"Many universes are hanging  
from each single strand of hair  
on Sri Krishna's arm!"

"ATMARE ATMA JE MISHANTTI,  
JANMA MARANE NAHIN BHRANTI"

"One who merges in Paramatma  
Has no care  
Whether he lives or dies."

Children may be unable to read, but they must be able to recite lines from this poem in Oriya. If they are educated and don't know any lines from the Oriya BHAGAVATA, they are considered illiterate even today.

The reason is this. At the time of a parent's

death, it is the sacred duty of the son to read or sing these songs so that the father or mother will have no birth again.

In olden days my father used to take me with him to the temple and if we met one of his old friends on the way, that friend often asked, "What is his qualification?" I was a college graduate, but my father never recognized this. He only replied, "He can read Bhagavata when I die."

More than 43 versions of RAMAYANA exist in India, all describing the life of Sri Rama. But in the Oriya BICHITRA RAMAYANA, written by Biswanath Khuntia in the 15th century, rich and detailed descriptions are made, as if the poet were painting a picture, a CHITRA. In the following excerpt, the poet is describing the coming of enemy Ravana for darshan of Lord Rama.\* Such description is not found in any of the other RAMAYANAS.

Ravana wanted to know how many soldiers Lord Rama had. He sent his two expert mathematicians to find out. Even though they could tell the exact number in a crowd without calculation, they could not count Rama's men. Seeing from a distance, they found soldiers wherever they looked. The army was numberless! When Ravana heard this, he became enraged and went himself.

"MANTRI MUKHU SUNI KOPE BINSAPANI,  
PUSHPAKA JANE BIJE KALA,  
DHANUSAR DHARI AKASE RAHIN,  
SUBAL GIRIKI CHAHINLA.  
DOLE DEKHILA DURBADAL RAMA SARIR  
BRAHMANDA SHOBA KI GHENI UPAHAR,  
MADANA JAAR PARICHAR."

"Twenty-handed Ravana,  
Hearing the news of his ministers,  
And with mighty bow and arrow,

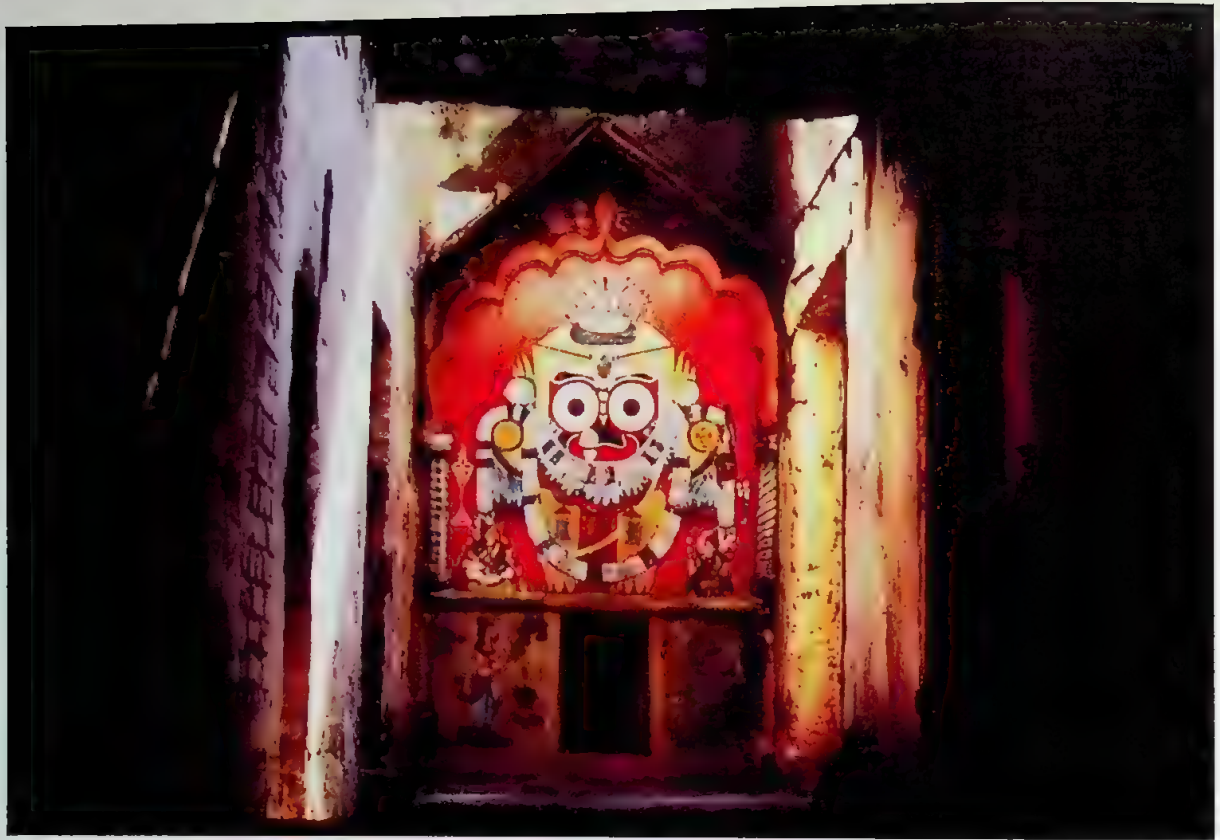
*Opposite: On auspicious days people go in groups to take bath in the ocean at dawn.*

\* DARSHAN means "sight of a divine being."









*Lord Jagannath as seen from the alley of Emar Math. The main deity of Jagannath Temple, Lord Jagannath is installed in all homes and monasteries of Puri and worshipped daily.*

Went to Subalagiri Mountain,  
In his PUSHPAKA airplane,\*  
To see Lord Rama.

"He saw with his own eyes,  
The beautiful body of Sri Rama,  
Which was as soft as the green grass,  
And he felt as if the form of Rama  
Was the most attractive in the universe!"

So seeing, even the demon Ravana forgot his  
evil intentions, his BIKRUTI, and became lost in  
contemplation on the beauty of the Lord. The  
purpose of all culture in Orissa is to help man  
reach such divine heights of consciousness. This  
is what is meant by SANSKRITI here.

"KENE GHENI JAUCHHA  
JAGANNATHANKU . . .?"

"Where, oh where,  
are you taking my  
Lord Jagannath?"

Addressing the Lord as one would a small  
child, "JAGANNATHANKU," the Muslim poet  
Salebega of the 15th century humbly pleads with  
the worshippers of Jagannath Temple not to take  
his Lord away.

"Of whom shall we have our darshan . . .?"

The feeling is strong in Puri that without God

\* A PUSHPAKA chariot could fly like an airplane when certain rare flowers or PUSHPANA were given powerful mantras. My father never appreciated modern technology. When I was a small boy I used to point to the sky if an airplane passed overhead. My father would say, "These airplanes are nothing newly invented. They were used in RAMAYANA time in India, but were meant only for the gods. The rare flowers freed them from the force of gravity. Many secrets the ancients knew, but modern man has forgotten."

there is only suffering. That is why people even on their way to work stop at the main gate of the temple for darshan. In another song Salebega sings

"EKATO BHAKATA JIBANA..."

"To a devotee, God is one's very breath!"

Salebega became a very great devotee of Lord Jagannath even though he was a non-Hindu and was never allowed inside the temple. His mother had been Hindu, but his father was a Muslim soldier who had been sent to attack Jagannath Temple and plunder its wealth. In the single beginning line of the song "KENE GHENI JAUCHHA JAGANNATHANKU," all the deep pent up feelings of the poet's life are revealed. On a Rath Yatra Car Festival day, the Lord is being carried in a great chariot to Gundicha Temple along the Grand Road of Puri. Salebega is on that road, waiting.

Nowhere else in India, except perhaps in Brindavan, the childhood home of Sri Krishna, can one find the presence of God everywhere. In every shop, and even in alleyways, one sees a painting or image of Lord Jagannath.

Just recently the city government of Puri banned the sale of fish and meat on Grand Road. It also banned the playing of pop or disco music on loudspeakers there. Only BHAGAVATA and devotional songs are now allowed. The reason for this is that the three deities of the temple, elder brother Balabhadra, sister Subhadra, and Lord Jagannath themselves journey down this road once a year in the grand Chariot Festival. Not only the road itself is thereby considered holy, but even a particle of dust taken from it!

The Rath Yatra Car Festival is the one time in the year in which a non-Hindu like Salebega can have darshan. Yet in the history of Puri, it was also marked by many threats and dangers from outside invaders. On one Rath Yatra the wooden chariots and the wooden deities were actually

burned. All these feelings are contained in one simple line,

"Oh where are you taking  
my Lord Jagannath?"

In another famous song Salebega addresses his own mind,

"THAKA MANA CHALA JIBA,  
CHAKA NAYANA DEKHIBA."

"Oh tired mind,  
Let us go to see  
The round-eyed Jagannath . . .

"We will wash our eyes  
In the place which is  
In the middle of the conch."

Only when one is finished with the endless worldly pursuits of PRAKRUTI and BIKRUTI, can his higher nature, his SANSKRITI, take over. At that time a devotee desires to journey to Jagannath Puri at least once in his lifetime, for it is one of the four holy dharmas of India set up by the great philosopher saint Adishankar in the 9th century A.D. to protect Hinduism.

"The place which is in the middle of the conch" is Jagannath Temple itself. In olden days the town of Puri was in the shape of a conch with the huge temple in the exact center, like a huge blue mountain, visible for more than five kilometers all around.

If Jagannath Temple is the heart and soul of the people of Orissa, it may also be said that the poems and devotional songs of the four greatest Oriya poets are the four pillars on which the temple stands. They are Banamali Das, Gopala Krishna, Upendra Bhanja, and Kavisurjya Baladev Rath, the sun of poets. The center column of the temple is the immortal Sanskrit poem GEETA GOVINDA, written in the 12th





*People come from far and near to witness the great Car Festival of Puri. They believe their life is fulfilled if they see RATH YATRA at least once.*

century by Jayadev.

By the command of the King of Puri, Prataparudradeva Maharaj, in the 15th century (1499), it was to be sung nightly in the temple and this practice has continued even up until the present day. People keep a copy of this great love song, which glorifies PREMA, or the divine love expressed by Radha and Sri Krishna, on their home altars. They worship it even though it is a classical Sanskrit poem and they may be unable to read it. Jayadeva spent many years in Puri and he depicted Lord Jagannath as Sri Krishna. GEETA GOVINDA in its deep esoteric sense describes the journey of a soul from body consciousness to divine awareness of union with God.

Sri Radharani must overcome jealousy, anger, and even her own sense of personal pride and honor, to merge into the ocean of love for Her beloved Lord. Only out of the greatest love was this possible. Once Sri Krishna suffered from fever and asked for the dust from the feet of a devotee. All shrank back at this request, thinking themselves to be too low and unfit. But Sri Radha did not think of herself at all and immediately gave what was asked for. This is true SANSKRITI in the Orissan way of thinking.

As a teacher of world literature in a teacher-training institute, I cannot think of any poem in western literature which reflects such sublime feelings of love. Because of its deep teachings for us in our personal lives and relationships, GEETA GOVINDA remains today very much alive and dear to the people of Orissa.

The concluding lines from the First Canto on Das Avatar say,

“SRI JAYADEVA KABERIDA MUDITA-  
MUDARAM,  
SRUNU SUKHADA SUBHADA  
BHABASARAM.”

“May the song of the poet Jayadev  
Evoke in our hearts

The deepest truths  
In the sweetest ways.”

After Jayadev, four great poets were born who wrote only in the Oriya language, as if to translate the difficult Sanskrit poetry of GEETA GOVINDA into the simple language of the common man. The whole cultural heritage of Puri is based upon the spiritual impact such songs have had on the people. Like the foundation stones of the great temple itself, this literature has not only enriched the bhajan trend, but it has rescued the Oriya language as a whole and uplifted it to the status of a separate language.

The first and foremost of these classical poets to do so was Baladev Ratha, (about 1779-1838), better known today as Kavisurjya, the sun of poets. At that time poets of Bengal were claiming Oriya to be just another Bengali dialect. But due to the greatness of Kavisurjya's magnum opus work KISHORACHANDANANDA CHAMPU, the Oriya language has come to have its own identity and unique style.

Baladev Ratha created this style of pure Odissi songs, known as CHAMPU. In this great collection of his, there are 36 CHAMPU. Each song begins with a consecutive letter of the Oriya alphabet, which contains 49 consonants (13 are rarely used). Almost every line of that poem also begins with that letter and carries that alliterative sound throughout the line.

However, Kavisurjya's poems rise beyond the technical mastery of the Oriya language. In the most beautiful images, each CHAMPU describes the love of Radha and Krishna, each expressing a new mood or deeper aspect of their divine love relationship. The love of Radha and Krishna is by far the most dominant theme of Oriya literature since the time of Jayadeva's GEETA GOVINDA. In Kavisurjya's poems the love drama is carried a step further and Radha and Krishna are more humanized.

The first CHAMPU, “KI HELARE KAHITA  
NUHAI BHARATIRE,” beginning with the Oriya



letter "Ka," contains such lines as,

"KOMALATARA MOHANA  
KUNJAKUKSHIRU NISWANA,  
ASI CHUMBIBELA MO SRUTIRE,  
KI HELARE KAHITA NUHAI  
BHARATIRE."

Radha tells Her friend of her first meeting with  
Sri Krishna,

"What happened,  
I am not able to express.  
I couldn't talk to Him,  
even though I wanted to,  
Just now thinking of Him in my mind,  
A black bee kissed my cheek,  
Forgetting hunger and thirst,  
I am unable to sleep or to be awakened  
either from this state,  
Wherever I look,  
I see Him!"

The Second Canto, beginning with the letter  
"KHA," carries her feelings even deeper,

"KHARAPA TU HELURE,  
KHELALOLAKHANJANAKSHI,  
KI SAHASA KALURE.  
KHARBA HOI SURA TARUKUSUMA  
BANCHILURE."

"But it is my mistake, my friend.  
He is like the loveliest flower in a  
tree from Heaven,  
I am like a dwarf  
and can't reach it.  
Thus I am suffering so."

Later in this poem, Radha's friend agrees,  
saying,

"When you just think of the hot sun,  
It makes you bend down and feel tired,

So when you aspire to reach the moon itself,  
It puts you in even greater difficulty."

Another line of the "KHA" poem  
describes the beauty of Radha's eyes,

"KHELALOLAKHANJANAKSHI."

"Her eyes are like a Khanja bird's,  
Always darting here and there."

Such are a young lady's eyes in her youth, like  
those of a young doe also, always restless, and  
looking for her mate. In comparison, a so-called  
modern poet described a young girl's eyes as  
looking like a "potala." This funny-looking vege-  
table resembles in shape an eggplant or potato!  
The eyes of Kavisurjya's Radha are a lovely  
uplifting example of SANSKRITI; while this  
modern day analogy only reflects BIKRUTI!

Also highly ornate and alliterative in style, the  
poems of Upendra Bhanja depict Lord Jagannath  
mostly as Sri Rama, not as Sri Krishna. As you  
know, Hinduism abounds with endless names  
and forms of God. The great beauty of the half-  
formed black wooden deity of Lord Jagannath,  
found only in Puri,\* is that He assumes whatever  
form the devotee loves and cherishes. Many  
miracles have occurred in Jagannath Temple  
down through the ages to affirm this. If one loves  
the form of the elephant-headed Ganesh, he will  
have a vision of Lord Jagannath with huge black  
elephant head.

Consequently, many dresses, or VESHAS,  
made of a traditional art material known as  
SOLA, are given to the three deities of Jagannath  
Temple throughout the year. In one such dress,  
Lord Balabhadra appears as Laxman, Sri Rama's  
brother, and goddess Subhadra as Sita, Rama's  
ideally-devoted wife, and Lord Jagannath, as  
Lord Rama Himself.

\*The deity is established in other Jagannath Temples built later  
elsewhere.



*As anything connected with the deities is considered very holy, people cut pieces from the rope used to pull the chariot of Lord Jagannath. For healing any incurable disease, the rope is put in a talisman to be worn around the neck.*

"Bisnupadi Bisnupada" is a Ninth Canto excerpt from Upendra Bhanja's great poem in praise of Lord Rama, "BAIDEISHA BILASA."

Although difficult and erudite, it describes most beautifully the meeting of a simple boatman with Sri Rama, while Rama, Laxman, and Sita were in exile in the forest.

"BADHIRA NUHEN MU BIRA  
BOILA TAHIN DHIBARA  
SUNI ACCHI PATHARE  
PATHARA ABALA,  
DHULI PADITO CHARANU  
ASANKA UPUJE TENU,  
NAUKA NAYIKA HELE  
BUDIBA BHELA."

When Lord Rama, with Sita and Laxman by His side, emerged from the forest, Rama called for the boatman to take them across the river. But the simple boatman who was long anticipating

their divine arrival was spellbound at Their beauty. He just stood and stared. Sri Rama asked, "Boatman, have you gone deaf?"

The following is the boatman's simple reply,

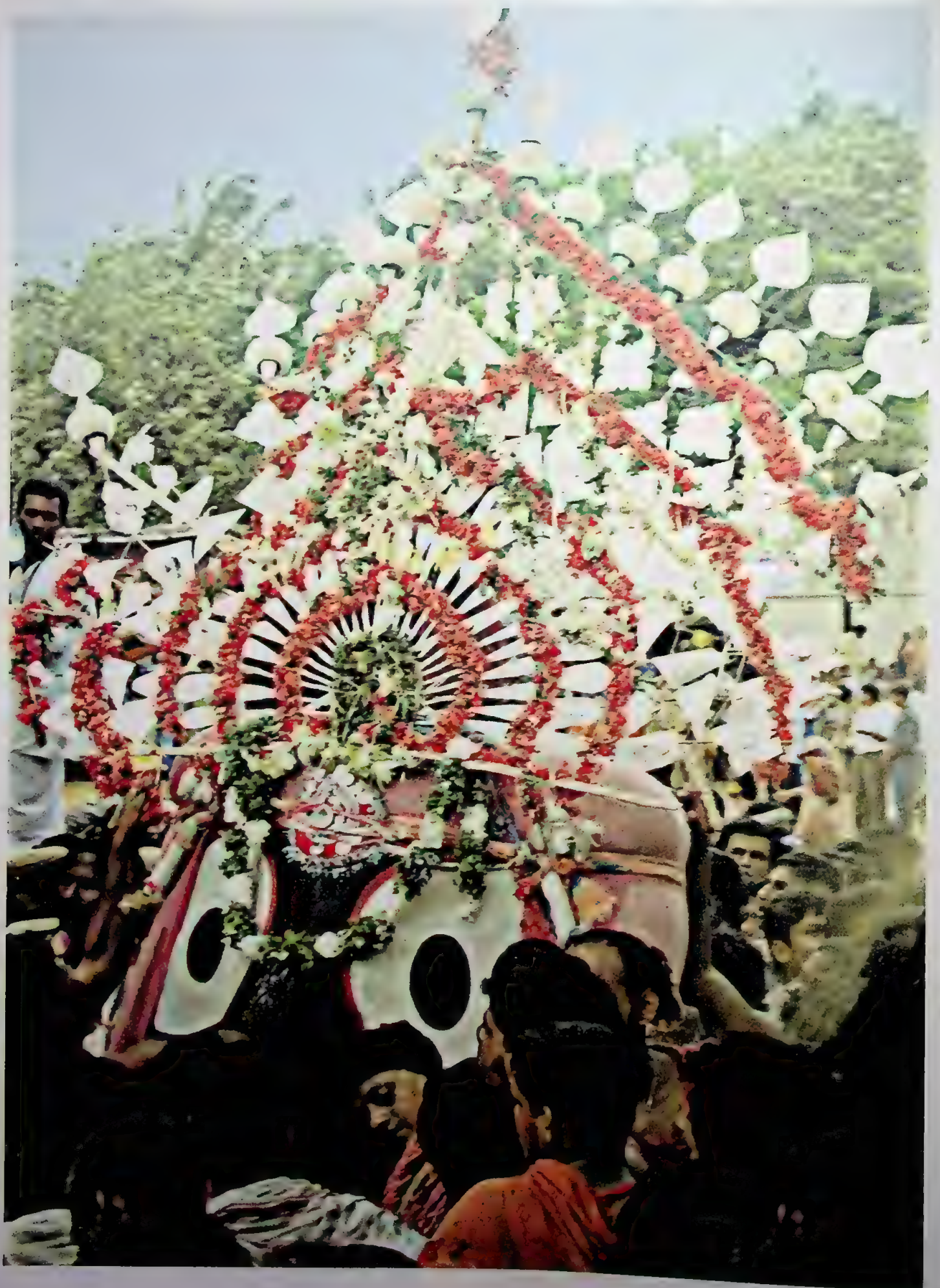
"Oh Lord, I am not deaf,  
The boatman finally replied,  
But please forgive me, Lord,  
I have heard even the dust from Your  
feet can turn a stone into a lady!"

"As sand has fallen on Your divine feet,  
I am afraid for my little boat.  
If it were to turn into a lady also,  
I, being a poor man, would become destitute.

(with no boat and  
then two wives to feed)

Please allow me to wash  
Your divine lotus feet.  
And the Lord permitted."







All the lines of the fourteen cantos of this magnificent poem begin with the Oriya character "BA." Because in this work he coined so many new words in Oriya that were of Sanskrit origin, Upendra Bhanja became known as Kavi Samrat, the emperor of poets.

Although born a prince in south Orissa (approximately 1685-1725), Upendra Bhanja lost both his wife and his kingdom. He realized that truly there was no king but God, his Lord Jagannath of Puri. In another song, "KAMBHU KATAK KSHETRA PURI," he writes,

"PURITA ACCHI JEUN SIRI,  
SRI JAGANNATH TARA NAMA,  
SUFALA KARAY SABU KAMA."

"The beauty of this holy place  
is Lord Jagannath Himself.  
Take shelter in Him  
and all your work  
will become successful."

For many years Upendra Bhanja practised Rama Taraka Mantra to become a great poet. The great heights of poetry that he eventually achieved show how much blessing he received from this mantra.

In his love poetry Upendra Bhanja was able to describe the sensuous beauty of a lady in so many charming images that people even today sing these songs without knowing their hidden meaning.

One of his simplest, but most well known love songs, "MALLI MALA SHYAMAKU DEBI," has become a basic part of the Odissi music and dance repertoire. It describes all the ways in which Radha tries to please her beloved Lord Krishna. As a devotee to God, or as a wife to her husband, all can relate to it.

The significance of such simple songs in

Orissan culture is that they reflect the basic belief of people of Orissa that God should be treated just like a friend. In western spiritual traditions, perhaps the Russian monk Brother Lawrence comes closest to this feeling in his little classic, "The Practice of the Presence of God."

Even the common man of Puri practices this "nearness and dearness" with God. In every home and every shop, be it a watch shop, betel pan shop, STD telephone cabin, bank, or police station, puja is done to an image or picture of Lord Jagannath daily. This puja is the same as that done in the great Jagannath Temple on a very grand scale.

The deity is given bath, dressed, offered sweet-smelling sandalwood paste, flowers, and incense. Then a dipa lamp is waved in front of Him and food, usually fruit, is "fed" to the Lord daily. In the temple itself these "feedings" occur at least six times per day. After "eating," even sweet betel pan\* is offered to Lord Jagannath.

The opening lines of Upendra Bhanja's "MALLI MALA" song reflect this same close bond between man and God.

"MALLI MALA SHYAMAKU DEBI,  
MANA TOSIBI . . .  
MALLI MALA SHYAMAKU DEBI."

"Oh my Lord Shyam,  
I will present You with the sweetest-smelling jasmine garland  
To please You  
and make You happy..."

To Her beloved Lord Krishna Radha tells that She will decorate Him with cool sandalwood paste in the hot summer season and wipe away His sweat with the cloth of Her own sari. When He is angry, She will make Him betel pan and give Him a sweet kiss on the cheek. When He is

Opposite: Lord Jagannath comes in procession to the chariot in a dancing style called PAHANDI.

\* In the temple this pan consists of betel nut, pan leaf, and clove, but no tobacco.



tired, She will massage His sore limbs and worship Him by waving a dipa lamp in the evening, all to make Him happy.

Like those of Kavisurjya, in the poems of Banamali Das of the 18th century (1737-1793), one will find mostly Radha bhava. But here the similarity ends. The poems of Banamali are truly romantic, not classical in style and treatment. Like the great romantic poets of England, he totally internalized his subject. Before him no poet identified with Radha so completely.

In the songs of Banamali, the poet feels himself to be Radha and Lord Jagannath to be Sri Krishna. He is known to have often said, "Until the feelings of Sri Radharani are fully embodied in oneself, one cannot have complete surrender to God." In a song often used for Odissi dance performances today, Banamali pleads with the Lord in this way,

"MURALI TORE SARANA GAWLEE,  
DEENENAW DAKILU  
RADHIKA BOLEERE,  
MURALI TORE SARANA GAWLEE."

"Oh Murali Krishna,  
My divine Flute-player,  
I have already surrendered myself at Your feet.  
But I beg You,  
Please do not call my name on Your flute again,  
Ever again..."

I am reminded of a newspaper article recently on Mother Theresa of Calcutta in which she is quoted as saying, "God gives us only what we can handle, only I just wish He wouldn't trust me so much!" Here in this poem, Radha, and the poet Banamali, complain to the Lord of all their increased difficulties after coming to know of Him!

Unlike the other contemporary poets of his day, Banamali was a real Vaishnavite sannyasi, who had already renounced the world. He was the head monk of Gangamata Monastery, which

is still active today in Puri.

Although as head monk he had many responsibilities, his habit was to be present for all the rituals in the temple daily, sometimes sitting there for ten to twelve hours. Most of his songs were spontaneously composed inside Jagannath Temple itself.

Because of these long lapses from the matha, he was often criticized as lazy and put hard to task. In one song Banamali wishes to be a sevaka and belong only to the temple, and not to his monastery even!

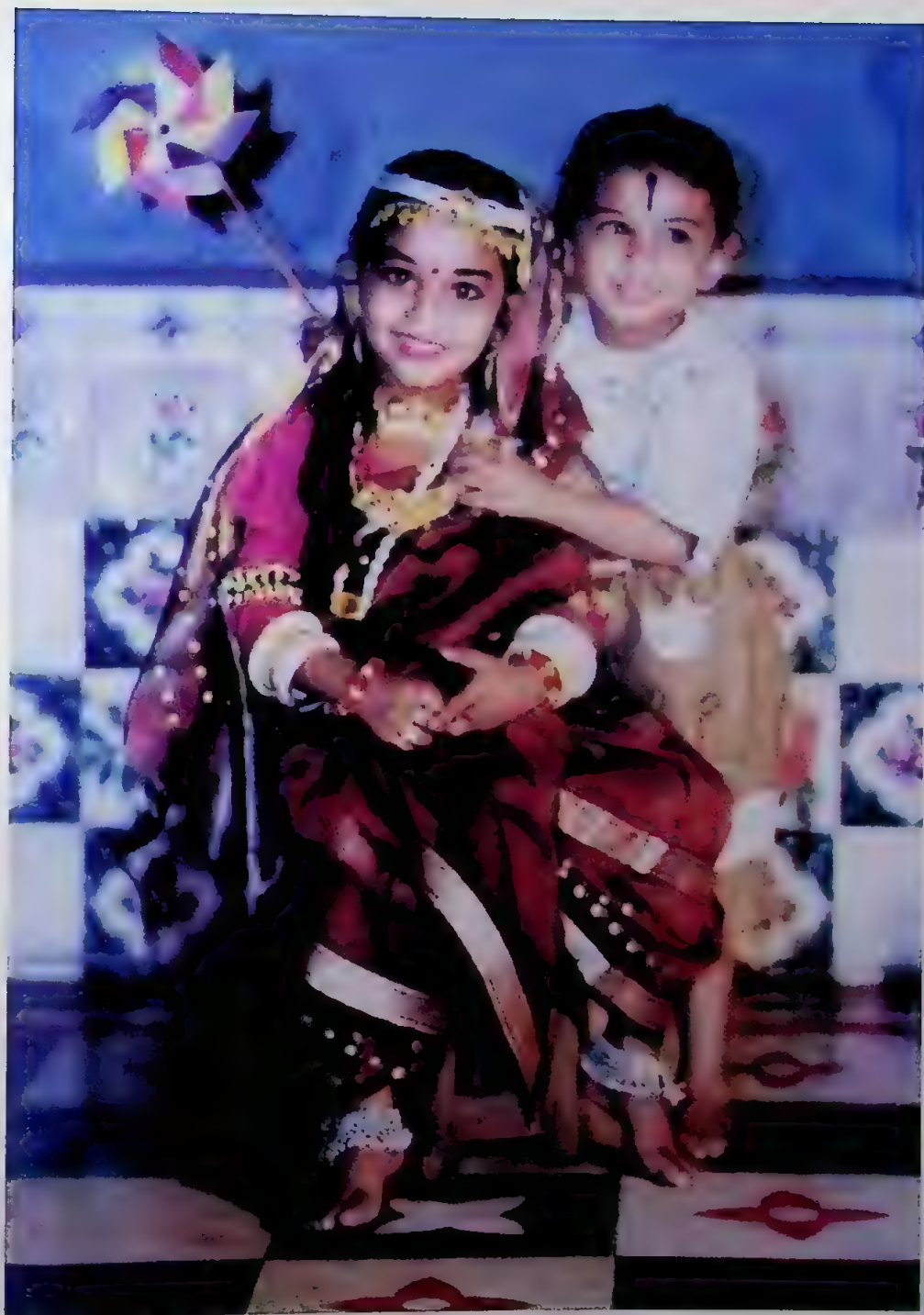
Banamali's existing songs number more than 200, but he was not recognized in his lifetime. He sought the patronage of no king, which was still the practice of poets in his day. He said, "I know no durbar, no court, except the temple of Lord Jagannath." Although rich as the head monk of a monastery, he considered himself poor and attached only to Lord Jagannath.

Perhaps because of his own deep feelings of Radha bhava, this monk, who spent all his days in the temple, understood the psychology of ladies of Orissa very well. In the following song, his Radha humbly laments,

'KAHINKI NAILA MORA,  
KUNJAKU SHYAMA NAGARA,  
KI MANTRA KALA SE  
KEUN CHATURI RASIKABARA."

"Oh my Lord Krishna,  
Why have You not come  
to my creeper hut tonight,  
I have hung all the flower garlands  
Only for You.  
Perhaps You are under the spell  
Of some better lady than I."

Traditionally, ladies of Orissa, especially those of the worshipper community of Jagannath  
*Opposite: In the worshipper community it is a custom to dress up little children as Radha and Krishna. Here a small boy is actually in the dress of Radha, playing with his small brother Krishna.*









Temple, feel that whatever the circumstances or difficulties, whatever her husband does, she will still wait for him, and not even eat at night until he comes. When she finally sees her husband coming, she feels very much elevated. Radha tells further in this song,

"Krishna may not like Me,  
He has not come tonight,  
But does it mean that  
I do not love Him,  
Whatever He does?  
Only why isn't He coming...?"

In Jayadeva's earlier song, "Yahi Madhava," an excerpt from his "GEETA GOVINDA," Radha tells Sri Krishna in a similar circumstance to leave, "Go, my Lord!" angrily but still with deep love in Her heart. She is the highest type of heroine, or NAYIKA, never throwing anything at Her beloved or calling Him any abusive names. Yet in the end of this song, She sadly leaves, though even then looking back with love in Her heart.

But here in Banamali's treatment of the same scene, Radha only asks humbly why He is late, what has She done wrong, and waits. In olden days in Puri, women wore their best saris and bangles at bedtime and put red alta on their feet. This was all done to please their husbands, and they arranged the room in a beautiful way.

But interestingly, unlike ladies of South India, no women of Orissa ever put flowers in their hair. Flowers are meant only for God. Here in this song not only has Radha placed beautiful gold dipa lamps all around the bed, She has also covered it with the sweetest-smelling jasmine flowers. She

*Opposite: Ladies of Puri follow old traditions and do not show themselves outside but decorate themselves only for their husbands.*





has hung a lovely applique decorative cloth over the bed.

"You assured Me of Your coming,  
I believed this whole-heartedly,  
So is it My mistake?  
I mixed scent with Your cool  
    sandal paste,  
And made a garland of sweet white  
    Niali flowers,  
And betel pan for You,  
The dipa lamps stayed lit  
    until morning,  
Awaiting Your coming . . .  
You promised to come,  
    touching my feet,  
To whom can I turn to,  
    if not to You?"

In one of the last songs of Banamali, the poet expresses some of the deepest longings of the people of Puri. Like a traditional worshipper in the temple, he spent his whole life remembering, enjoying, and serving Lord Jagannath. In his last breath, he prayed for the Lord's darshan.

"MANIMA HEY!  
ATIKI MAGUNI MORA,  
MARANA KALARAY  
DARASANA DEBA,  
KALA MUKHA  
KALA KARA.  
MOTHARAY TEEBA MO  
TUMA CHHAUDA MALA,  
MUKHARAY TIBA TULASI.  
MANIMA HEY . . ."

"Oh Lord Jagannath, be kind!  
This is my last wish or prayer,

When I die, give me darshan  
of Your beautiful black face,  
Where my body is lying,  
See that Your used tulsi garland  
Is lying beside my head,  
And in my mouth Your MAHAPRASAD,  
A leaf even of Your divine tulsi.  
So being with You,  
Let me die."

"MANIMA HEY" is an address, meaning, "Oh great Master!" The height of culture in Orissa is to have a vision of God in one's last moments. One may be rich or poor, or uneducated even, but if he has such a divine focus in his last breath, his life becomes successful and blessed.

Banamali expressed in song the ever-changing moods of a devotee with God, sometimes as a friend, servant, beloved, or confidante. He was to Sri Krishna, or Lord Jagannath, as the great poet Tyagaraj of South India was to Sri Rama. His songs have become immortal, attracting all by their sweet melodies and deep divine feelings.

Banamali truly had a man's greatest gift, that of transferring to his listeners his deepest spiritual experiences through the medium of his songs. It is said by people of Puri that if someone is very unhappy, he should read at least one poem of Banamali, and his sorrow will vanish!

More than any other poet of Orissa, Gopala Krishna of the early 1800's elevated the feelings of the common man from the ordinary to the divine. A born poet, he had knowledge of many holy scriptures, but wrote in the simple imagery of daily life. His father was an advisor in the British court in southern Orissa, but Gopala Krishna himself never held a job.

"DHANA UTHILU" is a favorite lullaby of his. It expresses the whole range of a mother's feelings for her baby. She worries, guides, scolds sweetly and becomes softly angry sometimes. Even after 100 years, this image of a mother in Orissa depicted by Gopala Krishna is true and perma-

*Opposite: A lady peers through the window, affectionately waiting for her husband who is late.*



nent.

"DHANA UTHILU  
ADE BAYGAY KAHINKIRE  
DADHI MANTHIEE DAYBU  
NAHINKIRE?"

"Oh my dear child,  
My wealth,  
Why did you leave your bed  
at this early hour,  
Will you not let me churn  
the milk into butter?"

The song continues how she promised to put him to sleep again, but then looks up and sees, "Why are you dancing, putting your thumb in your mouth, you will be sick! Do not look back at your shadow like that, my child, or you will become weak! Let me clean your face with my cloth." As she does so, the song concludes with the poet Gopala Krishna's own reflection, "The poet thinks both mother and child are lucky!"

The very title reflects this traditional feeling of motherhood in Orissa. "DHANA" literally means "my wealth." A child is felt to be a mother's true wealth, her only "DHANA" and in colloquial Oriya even today a son is often addressed tenderly as her "DHANA." My wife and daughters tell the babies in the house, "ARE DHANA, KHAIDE!" "Oh my child, my wealth, you eat now and don't play!"

In the mind of Gopala Krishna, all of man's relationships in the world should become divine, like that of Radha and Krishna. In the exquisite love song, "KADAMBA BANAY BANSI BAJEELARE," the poet expresses all the sublime feelings of Radha for her beloved Lord.

"KADAMBA BANAY BANSI  
BAJEELARE, SAJANEE,  
RADHA DAMBHA SIKHAREE  
BHAJEELARE,  
TOBINE PRATIKARA ANAKE

NAHIN MORA,  
BIVEKA RATANA MO  
HAJEELARE."

"Oh my divine Flute-player,  
Playing Your sweet music  
Under the Kadamba Tree,  
The tree of Love,  
Surrounded by lovely cowherd maidens,  
If Your Radha hears the sound  
of this flute,  
She becomes senseless,  
My only solution is not to go near,  
Ever again..."

In ordinary love one finds a mixture of love and anger, jealousy and pride. But by reading and singing such songs as KADAMBA BANAY BANSI, one becomes uplifted and love is sublimated into the divine ocean of love, PREMA SAGARA.

While yet a classical poet, Dinakrishna Das of the 17th century wrote in simple tunes of the ecstasy and agonies of ordinary life. He was known as a poet with a backbone.

Unlike most of his contemporaries including Kavisurjya and Upendra Bhanja, who catered to kings and gave their sensuous poetry ornate dress, Dinakrishna Das wrote only to Krishna. In spite of extreme poverty throughout his life, he refused to bow down and praise any other king. In "ARE KALA MALLI" he reminds man of the true essence of human life,

"ARE KALA MALLI,  
BHANGI JIBA DINE,  
ANTA BHANGA CHALI  
KACHA SINDURA DEI,  
JAHAKU KARICHHU NARI  
SE TOTE BOLIBA  
BHUTA BOLI."

"Oh black malli flower,



A young mother holds her baby after waking. To mothers of Puri a child is felt to be their only wealth.



Oh foolish man,  
 Your human birth is very rare,  
 You are so proud in your walk,  
 But one day you yourself will vanish.  
 All these bangles and gifts you have  
     given to one  
 Whom you call your wife,  
 The one to whom you have given  
     so much,  
 One day when you visit her  
     after your death,  
 She will call you a ghost  
 and fearfully close the door!"

The poet calls man "a black malli flower"  
 because human birth is very rare. Man should not  
 waste his life on trivial matters. He should instead  
 live his life in thoughts of divinity.

My own father became sad when I chose an  
 academic career in government service, instead  
 of only service in the temple. I was the first to do  
 so in my family. He said, "You are going like a  
 government dog to touch the feet of others when  
 they have come to your forefathers for centuries  
 as Jagannath worshippers to touch their feet!"

In modern times, the poet Kalicharan Patnaik,  
 (1897–1978), helped to revive the classical style  
 of Odissi songs without any modern commercial  
 influences. But he wrote in the common man's  
 language as did Gopala Krishna and Banamali.

Unlike the classical poetry of Kavisurjya and  
 Upendra Bhanja, his songs are simple and direct;  
 they need no heated literary discussion or debate  
 as to their meaning. Yet they are cool and sooth-  
 ing on the mind, for they have no worldly refer-  
 ences. Because of this, Kalicharan Patnaik was  
 given the title Kavichandra, the moon among  
 poets of Orissa.

In "DELA JAHA NELA TAHA," he talks to the  
 Lord in such a familiar way, as one would to a  
 close family member, or the head of the house.  
 Actually this is the true spirit of religion here. Lord  
 Jagannath and the common man are one in spirit;

talk is heart to heart, friend to friend. Here in a  
 lighthearted satirical way, Kavichandra chides his  
 Lord,

"DELA JAHA NELA TAHA,  
 ATHAKUKI CHAU BAHA DATAPANE,  
 PATAKA BANDHICHHA."

"Lord, whatever You have given me,  
 You have also taken away!  
 So how can You be called a great giver?  
 The cloth You took from the gopis,  
 You gave to Draupadi,  
 The kingdom You took from Rama's  
     father Dasaratha,  
 You gave back to Harischandra,  
 The wealth You took from King Bali,  
 You have given to everyone else!  
 Is this Your Grace?"

Although a man from the city of Cuttack, only  
 some 125 kilometers from Puri, Kalicharan  
 Patnaik did not come often to the great  
 Jagannath Temple. In the following song, he  
 replies to an inner dialogue with his Lord  
 Jagannath,

"NAYANE NAYANA DEKHA  
 NAHIKI MANE,  
 SAYANE, SWAPANE ABA  
 JAGARANARE."

"Oh Lord Jagannath,  
 You have accused me  
 That I never go to Your house,  
 But do You not remember  
 Once we met eye to eye.  
 After this meeting,  
 Whether sleeping, dreaming,  
     or awake,  
 I see You everywhere!"

The power of God is His omni-presence. Even  
 though people of Puri, and India as a whole,



*Like a victorious hero, a little boy sits on a new wooden horse being made for Car Festival. Horses represent the runaway senses in the human body that must be controlled.*

worship idols, such as a wooden Jagannath, they realize that this life force, called Brahma, permeates every inch of space. An ancient Sanskrit sloka says,

“MAD BHAKA YATRA GAYANTE;  
TATRA TISHTAMI, NARAD.”

“I reside  
Where My devotee  
Sings My song.”

So in the case of Kavichandra, going to the temple alone could not satisfy his thirst for God. He wished to see Lord Jagannath in all. At the end of his life Kalicharan Patnaik was also given another title, NATAKASAMRAT, emperor of

drama, and awarded the rare chance of CHAMARA SEVA\* inside the great Jagannath Temple itself. This is the only service inside the temple allowed to devotees other than traditional worshippers, and is only granted by the King of Puri himself.

Although I never met Kavichandra personally, it was my very good fortune to have some personal contact with another great modern-day poet-singer, Nimaicharan Harichandan (1914-1984).

Nimaicharan was the first Oriya singer to spread devotional songs over the air waves via

\* CHAMARA SEVA is fanning the Lord in the hot afternoon during and after His “meal.”







radio. In my youth I often travelled all over the province of Orissa with him, to every village, to bhajan gatherings everywhere.

As a worshipper of the temple, I would give a short talk on Lord Jagannath and the significance of the many temple rituals. Then he would lead all of us in spontaneous bhajan singing. People gave him great acclaim wherever he went. Yet it was his daily practice to go to Jagannath Temple for darshan.

On one such early morning I met the old man at Lion's Gate of the temple and asked, "Sir, you are such a great devotee of the Lord, why do you need to come to the temple?"

The old man said softly, "Let no one call me a great devotee of God unless I die with His name on my lips." In 1984, on the very day of Car Festival itself, and while he was singing a bhajan over the loudspeakers to the vast crowd assembled, the old man died.

It was Nimaicharan's deep belief that God was man's only friend in this world. In the following song, he reminds His great old friend of their eternal friendship.

"AAHE DINABHANDHU,  
ABE BANDHUPANA JANA PADILA,  
TUMA NAMA BHAJI  
BHAJI DIBARATI,  
DAIBA KASHANA NA GALA."

"Oh God!  
I know that You are my only friend.  
I repeat Your name day and night,  
But sorrows are still with me.  
Is this friendship?"

"TANU MORA KSHIEENA,  
HUE DINUDINA,  
BHAGARI HASUCHHI CHAHIN  
MO BADANA.

*Opposite: An old man meditates in front of the chariot of Lord Jagannath, as if wishing to get liberation from this world.*

KARAMA LIKHAN  
NA HOIBA ANA.  
BANDHU DARSHANA NOHILA,  
JIBANATA DUKHE BITILA."

"My body is weakening day by day,  
My enemies laugh,  
seeing my plight,  
What is written in karma  
cannot be denied,  
Still when I do not see Your face,  
My life is spent in misery,  
Is this friendship?"

Today people of Puri refer to the grand old man Nimaicharan Harichandan as simply Banikantha, or Banikantha Nimaicharan. This title was conferred upon him by the king of Puri himself and means "the voice of Saraswati," goddess of wisdom and music.

Great songs have been composed by people of every class and profession in Orissa. The kings of Puri often were fine musicians and the warrior hero Chakhi Khuntia wrote bhajans as well. The great poet-saint Adishankar founded Govardhana Pitha in Puri in the 9th century. During his stay in Puri, he composed eight Sanskrit stanzas in praise of Lord Jagannath, called JAGANNATH ASTAKA.

The most famous lines from this work are recited or sung in almost all Odissi dance and music programs and every year during the great Car Festival as the chariots are pulled down the Grand Road of Puri.

"KADACHIT KALINDI" has become synonymous with Orissa itself and a symbol of the goal of all Orissan culture.

"KADACHIT KALINDI,  
TATA BIPINE SANGITA KARABO,  
MUDABIRI NARI PADANA KAMALA  
SWADA MADHUPAH.  
RAMA, SAMBHU, BRAHMA,



SURAPATI ARCHITA PADAU,  
JAGANNATHA SWAMI,  
NAYANA PATAGAMI,  
BHAVA TUME,  
BHAVA TUME."

"Oh Lord,  
Who once in the gardens  
On the banks of the River Kalindi,  
Created most excellent music  
with Thy flute,  
And who like the honey bee,  
Did kiss the lotus lips  
Of the cowherd women.

"Oh Lord,  
Whose feet the gods worship,  
As do Rama, Sambhu. and Brahma,  
And as do Indra, the king of gods,  
And Ganesh.

"Oh Lord Jagannath,  
Manifest Yourself  
before my eyes,  
Manifest Yourself  
before my eyes . . ."

*Opposite: A little boy eats a bowl of KHEERI, a favourite sweet of Orissa prepared out of the cream of milk and offered to Lord Jagannath*

*Following Pages: People of the famous art village of Raghurajpur take morning bath in the river. A traditional toothbrush, known as DANTAKATHI, is still used. It is an herbal remedy for tooth disease.*



















## TRADITIONS

My father was a traditional worshipper of Jagannath Temple. By tradition we mean that it was a hereditary duty, passed on from generation to generation. Puri is considered an ancient town, not only because of its roots in the distant past, but also because of the strength of these ancient traditions today. If I may say so, it is one of the few places left in India where life is still governed mostly by tradition, and modernism has still not made many inroads.

My father in his lifetime refused to have electricity in his room. He read GEETA daily at 5 a.m. by oil lamp. In the temple kitchens, electric lights and fans were introduced only recently.

My father used to say that traditions are our best friend. They walk with us throughout our lives and guide us on the right path. In them are contained all the wisdom of our forefathers.

Perhaps because countries like America are young and have no strong traditions of their own, young minds become confused and distracted easily from the proper path.

It's a joke among the ladies of our worshipper community that we men of Puri have a sloka or saying to defend ourselves against anything. All believe that their hometown is best. That is good and we feel that way also.

“BARSHANAM BHARAT SRENTAM,  
DESHANAM UTKAL SHRUTAM,  
UTKALSYA SAMO DESHA,  
DESHA NASTI MAHITALE.”

*Opposite: Before cutting the logs for Rath Yatra chariots, Pujapanda priests do a special puja on Aksaya Trutiya day in May.*





"Among all countries,  
Mother India is the best.  
Among all provinces,  
Utkal (Orissa) is best.  
There is no better place than this  
in the whole world."

This sloka, taken from the ancient palm leaf text of KAPILA SANHITA, probably written by Kapila Mahamuni in ancient times, speaks of Puri as heaven on earth to the rishi.

How these traditions of Puri developed is shrouded in the veils of ancient history. The word PURI means "purna, or fullness." But throughout its rich history, Puri has been called by many names. Perhaps foremost among all these names is JAGANNATH DHAM, or JAGANNATH PURI, the abode of Lord Jagannath. There is a saying in Orissa that if one says, "I have just come from Orissa," no one will understand or know where it is, but if one tells, "I have just come from Jagannath Puri," all will know.

The word DHAMA means "to hold, or contain something very high and sacred." It refers only to holy places that can uplift consciousness. Puri is such a place, as Lord Jagannath has been seated here since time immemorial.

Truthfully speaking, the place and the deity are inseparable. One has the tangible feeling of the presence of Lord Jagannath everywhere. This is due to the fact that the traditions of home life and the temple are so intimately connected, perhaps more so than anywhere else in India or the world.

The elaborate rituals of Jagannath Temple are

practiced in the houses, especially those of the worshipper community, at least in a small way. Fruits, and often rice offerings, are given to the home deity daily. A small form of Lord Jagannath, called PATITA PAVANA, savior of the fallen, is found in every house.

The images of the temple are changed every 12 to 16 years because they are made of wood. At this time people also change their home Jagannath and mourn as if the head of the family had died. The inside of the houses of the Daitapati families, who are considered to be the original "kin" of the Lord, must be whitewashed, as is done in death ceremonies for a close relative.

Inside the temple itself, dates for holy festivals are set by the MUKTI MANDAPA Brahmins, who come from sixteen villages surrounding Puri. Founded by the kings of Puri, these special villages, known as SASANAS, were originally meant only for Brahmins who gave service in the temple. They are the deciding board on all rituals of the temple.

An interesting fact is that the date for a holy festival set in Jagannath Temple is the date observed for these celebrations in all homes of Puri also. The yearly almanac of Orissa, called PANJI, may list the day before, or the day after.

The whole of India may celebrate this holiday the day after, but Puri people do only as the temple does. In other holy cities of India, such as Krishna's boyhood home of Brindavan, there are many small temples, but no one temple is all-presiding, as is Jagannath Temple in Puri.

Spiritual traditions are by far the most dominant force of life in Puri, even today. The temple of Lord Jagannath is also known as NILACHALA, the blue mountain, as it resembles a huge blue mountain giving refuge to all. The town of Puri, by association, is also called NILACHALA.

*Opposite Clockwise: The town of Puri lies in the shape of a conch. At mother Batamangala temple on the road into Puri, a new bus is purified with puja. Lemons are placed under the four wheels so that nothing more will be hit by them in the future. At mother Jhadeswari temple devotees even today walk on fire as a test of faith in God. Pilgrims leaving Puri take a dry MAHAPRASAD, called KHAJA with them to distribute in distant places.*





*Even old ladies climb the wall for a glimpse of Lord Jagannath taking bath on SNANA PURNIMA day.*

The original deity of Lord Jagannath was called NILA MADHAVA by the hill tribesmen who were the original worshippers. This is because it was made of a very rare bluish-green stone, called NILAKANTA MANI, which gave off dazzling rays of light. The temple in those ancient times was covered with bluish-green creeper vines as it was then surrounded by thick jungle.

Thus came the name NILACHALA, or NILAGIRI, or NILADRI, all meaning the blue mountain. The sea touching the shores of Puri is part of the Bay of Bengal, but is called here NILA SAMUDRA, the emerald-colored sea, because of its closeness to the temple. On top of the temple is a wheel, or CHAKRA, from which a flag flies day and night. People believe that simply to see

this flag gives one Moksha, or liberation. The wheel is called NILA CHAKRA.

The word ACHALA means "a mountain, or that which cannot be changed, destroyed, or duplicated, that which is immovable like a mountain." Although there are more than one hundred Jagannath Temples in Orissa and India as a whole, and more than 282 other Jagannath Temples worldwide, there is only one NILACHALA.

None of these smaller temples can equal or exactly duplicate the NITIS, or rituals, of Puri's huge Jagannath Temple.

In other Jagannath Temples, the worshippers, or SEVAKAS, may come and go; but in Jagannath Temple of Puri they remain for life and

pass these temple duties on from father to son, from generation to generation.

The Rath Yatra Car Festival of Lord Jagannath may be held in many cities today, but dates may vary. Only in Puri must it happen on a specific date every year, according to the Indian lunar calendar, rain or shine.

I personally have stood, as a radio announcer for Rath Yatra, knee-deep in monsoon rains, as the huge chariots rolled down the Grand Road of Puri. The chariots could barely be seen due to the drenching rains; only the sound of the thundering wheels and beating of GHANTAS, or cymbals, by the sevakas on board could be heard. The worshippers on the chariots seemed oblivious to all these external inconveniences, while I on the sidelines worried about my new leather sandals being ruined!

Just as the fire in the temple kitchen never goes out, so too these traditions never die, however difficult they may be to carry out. Even in times of foreign invasions, Rath Yatra Festival never stopped. For the three-day festival to the Mother in October, new Durga Mother idols may be made, but once this tradition is started in a private house or a neighborhood of Puri, it must be maintained year after year.

This is because in Puri mother Durga is known as DURGA MADHAVA, or mother Lakshmi, whose husband is Lord Jagannath. Perhaps it is the Divine Power itself choosing to manifest in Puri that makes it possible to carry on all these activities here and thus makes life in Puri unique and one of a kind.

Jagannath Temple is essentially a Vishnu Temple, dedicated to Lord Jagannath. JAGAT means "world, or universe, that which is impermanent and will one day go." NATHA means "Lord, or master, the one who is beyond change and maintains and protects all." The culture of Vaishnavism was introduced into Orissa, then known as Kalinga, in the 4th century A.D., or even before.

From the 7th to 9th centuries many Vishnu temples were built in Orissa, as this Madhava cult was very popular and widespread. The title of one king of the Sailodbhava Dynasty was Chakradhara Madhava, meaning "the king was equal to the deity of CHAKRADHARA MADHAVA Himself, or Lord Vishnu, who holds the spinning discus as a weapon in his right hand."

In his left hand, Lord Vishnu holds a SANKHA, or conch, as His other weapon. These two "weapons" of Lord Vishnu are very sacred. They are used to save people, not to kill. Sankhas are blown in all Vishnu temples at puja time, but only Puri is known as SANKHA KSHETRA.

This is for two reasons. A KSHETRA is "a holy place," and sankhas are used for all vow-taking and purification rituals here. Water from a sankha is considered most pure as in the deep ocean pearls are formed from the water inside a conch. Some very rare sankhas give water from within the shells themselves. In India today three such pure sankhas are known.

One is in Nepal; one was given to Indira Gandhi when she was Prime Minister. Such sankhas are said to protect one from danger. Soon after it was accidentally broken, she was assassinated. The third rare sankha is kept in Jagannath Temple itself. It is about four times the size of an ordinary conch. Never used for actual puja, it is itself worshipped.

There is also a geographical reason for Puri being called SANKHA KSHETRA. In olden days the town resembled the shape of a conch, if viewed from the sky. The temple was in the actual center and homes surrounded it in this shape. Eight goddess temples protected the town in all the eight directions.

BATA MANGALA is the mother temple all pass on entering the town of Puri. It is like a spiritual checkpoint where all stop and pay their respects to the Divine Mother before entering this holy place. A sankha map of Puri decorates the side of this temple.





Not only is the water of the sankha sacred, but also its sound is sacred. It is blown in every puja, because its sound is felt to be the primordial OMKAR sound.

Out of this seed sound, all creation sprang. To hear it thrills and revives the soul. Not only in puja, but also in all varieties of meetings and cultural events, it is blown at the beginning to guarantee the success of the event.

As there is a small Jagannath in every home of Puri, there must also be a sankha, its sound is so auspicious. The great Oriya poet Banamali sang to Lord Jagannath, "Let me always be in Your sankha, with Your chakra over my head."

Today as sons and daughters may go out of Puri to live in distant places, parents often bless them with this same prayer, "Go where you may, but let your heart always remain in SANKHA KSHETRA, with His chakra over your head."

Another name for Puri is YAMANIKA KSHETRA. Yama is the name of the Lord of death. A TIRTHA means "a holy place of pilgrimage." In KAPILA SANHITA there is a sloka saying,

"AYODAYA, MATHURA, MAYA,\*  
KASIKANTI, ABANTIKA, PURI,  
DWARABATI CHAIVA,  
SAPTATE MOKSHA DAYIKA."

These are the seven holiest places in mother India that can grant liberation from this cycle of birth and death. Puri is one of them. Thus, it is a fervent wish of devout Hindus to journey to Puri at least once in their lifetime.

In the 9th century A.D., the great Hindu philosopher-saint Adishankar visited Puri. He wished to restore the Hindu religion from destruction. To do so, he established Govardhana Matha in Puri for the propagation of the philosophy of

Opposite: *The annual bath festival of SNANA PURNIMA can be seen by all from the Grand Road of Puri. Worshippers carry 108 pots of holy water to be poured over the deities.*

\* Maya is Kamaksha Temple of Gauhati, Assam. Abanti is the state of Nepal. Kasikanti is modern-day Benares.





*A pilgrim shows off his little son after having his first hair cutting in Puri.*

nondualism, or advaita-vada (Saivism).

He also greatly advanced the culture of Puri by proclaiming it as one of the four great holy places, or Dhamas, of Hinduism; the other three being Dwaraka on the west coast, Benares and Badrinath to the north, and Rameswaram on the southern tip of India. Even today Puri remains the eastern center for the four Shankaracharyas, who are the foremost advisors on Hindu thought and interpretation in India.

In ancient times Puri was a town mainly of monasteries and ashramas. Four great rishis built their ashrams here in Vedic times, the remains of which are still standing. They were BHRUGU ASHRAM, KANDU ASHRAM, ANGIRA ASHRAM, and MARKANDEYA ASHRAM.

All came to Puri in search of salvation. Bhrugu\* was the son of Baruna, a rishi in India's

distant past. In Rig Veda the name of Bhrugu is mentioned 18 times. Agni was his other name, as he had the power to swallow fire. He travelled all over India, but found no peace until he came to Puri. Then he felt after peace, only Moksha was necessary, and Moksha was granted in Puri.

Kandu Ashram still stands in Harachandi Sahi, although in dilapidated condition. Kandu searched for Brahma through meditation in Puri. His name as an ancient rishi is often mentioned in BAMADEV SANHITA, RAMAYANA, and VISHNU PURANA.

It is said that Sri Rama once met Kandu and asked his advice before selecting Sugreeva to assist him. Sugreeva would prove to be a good friend was Kandu's reply.

Kandu wanted to conquer death. He found that the only way was through the self-realization of

\* This Bhrugu is Bhrugubaruni, not the Bhrugu who wrote the famous future-telling book, "Book of Bhrugu."

Moksha, and then there would be no desires. Consequently, there would be no future births and deaths.

Angira was a great rishi who first invented fire for daily life. Through the light of his eyes, he set on fire any object he stared at with concentration. Although this great siddhi power was easy for him to perform, he realized that it was nothing useful for mankind.

A staunch Jagannath devotee, he was told in a dream to write a book on liberation for mankind. It was called MOKSHA BHABARTHA, and in writing this text down through divine visions, he himself got liberation.

Markandeya was a great guru. He knew how to conquer death also, by reciting the great mantra to Lord Shiva, OM NAMA SHIVAYA. If one recited it one lakh of times (about 20 hours of recitation), he would be victorious over death. Later his ashram became Markanda Temple, which is still one of the most powerful Shiva Temples of Puri.

A very famous incident happened to the son of a pandit there. The boy was told that he would die at the age of seven. To prevent this sad fate, he was taught this powerful mantra. On the fated day when Yama, the Lord of death, came to take him, he was inside this temple, chanting OM NAMA SHIVAYA. The boy momentarily forgot a line, and throwing himself around the Shiva lingam, he had a vision of Rishi Markandeya as Lord Shiva, who saved him.

In MARKANDEYA PURANA, it is stated that Markandeya was always immortal, floating on a bata leaf in the ocean of creation. Thus, Puri is called YAMANIKA KSHETRA, for it has been home to such great souls, all of whom found liberation here.

By the end of the 10th century, the early name of Lord Jagannath was changed from NILA MADHAVA to PURUSOTTAMA. PURUSHA means "man, person." UTTAMA means "supreme,

or best." This name thus refers to God as the "supreme person." Under the influence of the Ramanuja school of Vaishnavism, Lord Jagannath began to be treated in a more human way. Puri was becoming known as an important spiritual center and a repository of ancient Vedic culture. At this time it began to be called PURUSOTTAMA KSHETRA.

In BHAGAVAT GEETA, it is stated that man is part and parcel of the divine, being composed of two parts. One is the perishable body and the other is the imperishable soul, or ATMA. As the wave is to the ocean, so is man to God. There is no difference in essence.

So the Lord is revered as the "supreme person" and treated just like a man. Not only is he given daily food and bath, but all the rituals of a man's life are performed to him also. He is given a naming ceremony, an ear-piercing ceremony, a holy thread ceremony, a marriage ceremony, and a death ceremony.

Not only a death ceremony is done, but He Himself also performs (through His sevakas) a Sraddha ceremony to His "father." To show the intimate link between incarnations of Lord Vishnu in the past and Lord Jagannath, His "father" is said to be Vasudeva when He was born as Sri Krishna, and Dasaratha as Sri Rama.

As PURUSOTTAMA, Lord Jagannath represents the best in a man. He is given the best dress, the best food, the best ornaments. Individual persons have started these traditions out of intense devotion. As such, He stands as an ideal for humanity to look up to. In some other spiritual traditions, God is described as superior and distant from man, sometimes acting as an angry father. But in Puri we never think we are separate from God. He is in us, before us, and all around us. Wherever we go, we feel that His two big round eyes are following us, guiding us and watching over us. Minds are oriented in this way.

As Puri is the abode of the supreme person,







PURUSOTTAMA JAGANNATH, it is also the home of worldly kings. The reigning king is felt to be "the walking Jagannath." According to legend, it was a royal king of Nepal, King Indradyumna, who "discovered" Lord Jagannath. He sent his advisor Bidyapati all over India in search of Brahma, the divine life force. In the area of Puri the idol of NILA MADHAVA was found, to whom rare delicacies were offered daily by unknown sources.

Also according to legend, it was King Indradyumna who had a vision\* of the forms of the three deities, Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra, and Subhadra, and installed them in Jagannath Temple.

Even though no historical evidence remains today proving the existence of such a king called Indradyumna, his legacy of thought remains and has been passed down through generations of royal families. Indradyumna is said to have proclaimed, "Let me have no descendents to claim that they have done this work!" Such a great work as the temple of Lord Jagannath can be God's work alone. This royal tradition of humility lives on.

In the 8th century, Bhaumakara kings invaded Orissa. They were followers of Buddhism, but under the influence of the great Hindu philosopher Adishankar, they surrendered to the teachings of the ancient Vedas. One of the names of Puri today is BHAUMA KSHETRA.

In 1112 A.D., Chodaganga Deva of the Ganga Dynasty defeated the Soma kings and a golden age ensued. Although Chodaganga Deva amassed a vast amount of wealth on military

expeditions, he did not keep it in his personal treasury but spent it on spiritual affairs.

He started the main reconstruction of the temple at Puri, although it was never completed in his lifetime. It cost 12 lakh of rupees, in the form of 50,000 pure gold coins, to finish the great temple as we know it today.

Well-versed in Saivism, Vaishnavism, and mother worship of Saktism, he used for himself the titles: Parama Maheswara, Parama Vaishnava, and Parama Brahmanya in some temple inscriptions. Perhaps it was actually Chodaganga Deva, with his wide background of knowledge, who actually installed the Trinity in the temple.

Not a single image of NILA MADHAVA, but instead three deities were installed, in the forms of Balabhadra, or Sankarasana-siva, Jagannath, or Purusottama Vishnu, and Subhadra, mother Shakti.

All the three deities were worshipped by him in his old age in a royal manner befitting a Vishnu Temple and according to the systematic rituals then in practice in the temples of South India where he was raised.

According to temple inscriptions, the three deities were finally installed in the main temple in 1230 A.D., during the reign of Anangabhim Deva III. From this time onwards, rituals were performed in the temple on a grand scale, from morning to midnight, like that for an emperor.

Maharaja Anangabhim Deva III himself ceded all of his imperial powers and the entire dominion of Kalinga (Orissa) to Lord Purusottama. In a royal inscription, he proclaimed himself to be only the servant of Purusottam, ruling in the name of Lord Jagannath.

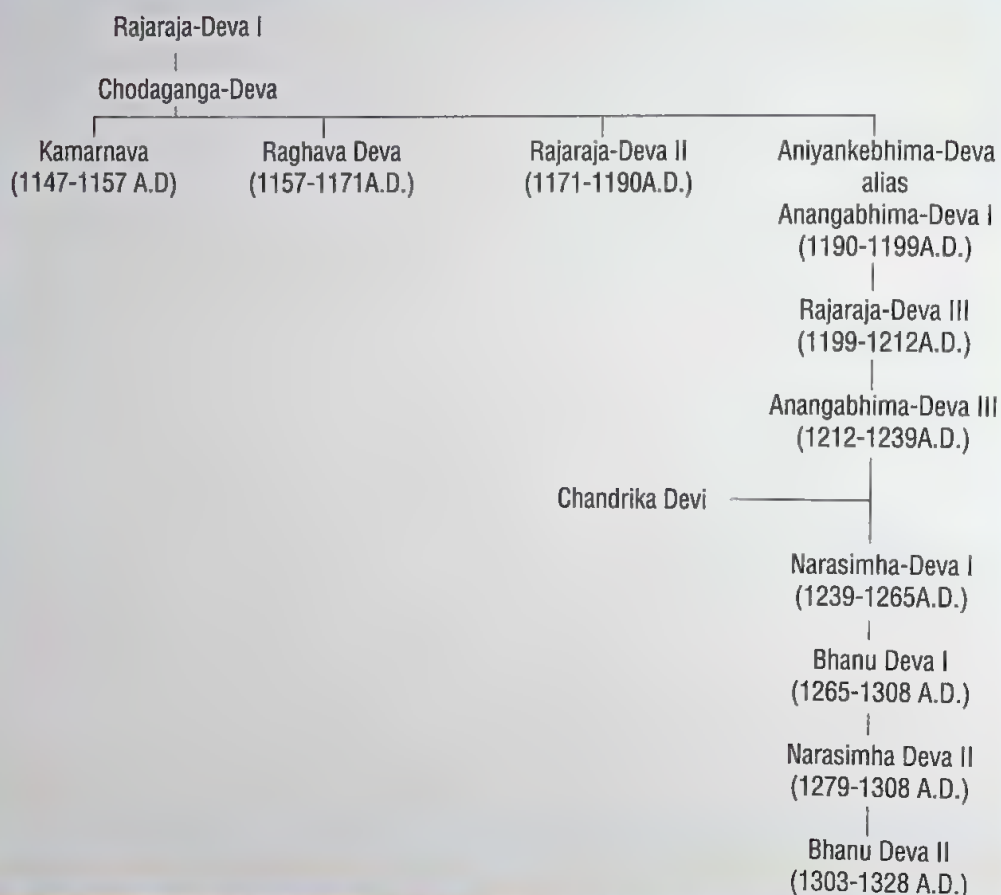
Just when the CHHERA-PAHARA ceremony began is unknown. This is a special ceremony on Rath Yatra days where the king of Puri himself sweeps the chariots of the Lord. In the 15th century, King Purusottama Deva was performing this task. A sweeper is usually a person of low caste. Upon hearing of the king's work, a foreign

*Opposite: Even though without a kingdom today, the king of Puri is given highest esteem, as the "walking Jagannath." Here the present king, GAJAPATI MAHARAJ Dibyasingha Deva is carried to the chariots in a palanquin.*

\* In a vision he was told to make a Nrisingha Yagna at Gundicha Temple. Out of this yagna the three images first emerged. They were then carved in wood by the divine craftsman Viswakarma himself.



## REIGN OF THE GANGA DYNASTY



ruler rejected the king's marriage proposal to his daughter.

Only later did he realize whose chariot the king was actually sweeping and repented. This story has become a great romantic poem of Orissa, known as "KANCHI VIJAYA".

It is said that Sri Chaitanya, on seeing the CHHERA-PAHARA of King Prataprudra Deva in the 16th century, wanted to sweep the whole of Grand Road.

By royal decree, he and his followers were given the chance to sweep Gundicha Temple on the day before Rath Yatra. This duty is still being

done today by his matha Radha Ramana Giridhar Kutir.

Although the raja of Puri today has no royal power or kingdom, his influence is still very great. GAJAPATI MAHARAJA SRI DIBYASINGHA DEVA still sweeps the three chariots during Rath Yatra Festival and is still considered to be "the walking Jagannath." Pilgrims to Rath Yatra derive great inspiration and pleasure from his royal presence.

Puri is also called SHREE KSHETRA. The word SHREE is used as a prefix to give respect. Its original Sanskrit meaning is "resplendent,



*The Maharaja of Puri sweeps the chariots as a sign of his service and surrender to Lord Jagannath.*







beautiful." Everything about Lord Jagannath is beautiful.

When He is decorated in golden ornaments three times in a year, He wears a huge golden crown, known as SHREEMAKUTA, golden necklaces, or SHREEMALAS, golden hands, or SHREEHASTA, and golden feet, or SHREEPAYARA. His golden ornament over his third eye is SHREECHITTA. Huge crowds assemble on these days just to have sight of such beauty.

So also is the culture of Puri rich in beauty. Until recent days DEVADASIS danced and sang in Jagannath Temple. They never married but rather devoted themselves to God in temple service. The last living Devadasi, KOKILA PRABHA, once answered sharply in reply to my question, "Did you wear silver or gold ornaments when you danced in the temple?" She said, "My God is not poor! We wore only gold." Modern Odissi dancers, however, can afford only silver jewelry!

It used to be said that the Devadasi never saw the light of the sun. This meant that she never danced outside the temple in public gatherings. Consequently, another school of dance developed in Puri in the 15th century to fulfill this need. This was the GOTIPUA tradition. Gotipuas are young boys under the age of fourteen who are dressed up as girls and sing and dance the love of Radha and Krishna.

At this age love is felt to be very pure, and so the MADHURARASA of Radha could be more truly experienced. Under the influence of Sri Chaitanya, Ramananda Roy, minister to the king of Puri, Prataprudra Deva, encouraged this art form in all the gymnasiums of Puri, called AKHADAS or JAGAGHARAS.

The Gotipua boys danced at public festivals outside the temple. The great gurus of Odissi dance today, Guru Pankaj Charan Das and Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, received their early training as Gotipua dancers.

The ornate sculpture of the great Konark Temple, 35 kilometers outside of Puri, helped to make it one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Every inch of the structure is covered with sculpture; like a poem in stone, vibrant with all the moods and moments of a man's life. The stone itself is laughing!

It is said this great temple, conceived as a chariot of the Sun God, once lifted off the ground at certain times of the day! These ancients had knowledge of electromagnetic fields and used this knowledge in the construction of Konark Temple.

For special festival days in Jagannath Temple, the deities are decorated in elaborate dress, with special crowns, and with animal and deva figures surrounding them.

The special material used for making these beautiful displays is called SOLA, a spongy reed found in marshes and out of which intricate works of art are carved. This has now become a unique art form of Orissa, called SOLA and JARI KAMA.

All of these arts have flourished because of their relationship with the temple. Thus Puri is itself resplendent with beauty. Even the lovely sea beach lends its beauty to the temple. A proposal was recently made by the Indian central government to develop Puri as a tourist attraction.

However, when many resort hotels were planned along its beaches, local people objected. The Indian Commissioner of Human Rights then stated, "People have a right to the preservation of their rich culture, not its exploitation!"

While Puri has many rich traditions, perhaps none is so well-known and cherished as that of taking together MAHAPRASAD. MAHAPRASAD is holy food that has been offered to Lord Jagannath in Jagannath Temple of Puri.

I once had the good fortune to meet an Indian

*Opposite: The world famous Konark Temple is sculpture on a grand scale. Thousands visit it yearly, as they do the Taj Mahal of North India.*







Opposite: *The last devadasi of Jagannath Temple, Kokila Prabha recalls her life in the temple. The devadasis never married, but were considered "the wives of Lord Jagannath."*

Opposite & Above: *Gotipua dancers of Raghurajpur perform difficult BANDHA NRITYA poses and both sing and dance the love songs of Radha and Krishna.*

couple who grew up in South Africa. I gave them some dry MAHAPRASAD, called KHAJA. They at once replied, "Oh, we have tasted this before, in our grandfather's house in Durban!" Although they had never been to Puri, and knew little about Lord Jagannath, His MAHAPRASAD had reached them!

What is most unique about MAHAPRASAD is that all can take it together, from the same plate even, as it is holy food offered to God. A low caste man and a high caste Brahmin can eat together, a non-Hindu and a Hindu, a teacher and his students, a father and his sons.

There is no difference or separation at all in partaking of this blessed food. Nowhere else in

Hindu society has this ever been possible. Puri has become famous for its MAHAPRASAD. Indira Gandhi once called Jagannath Temple "a grand hotel, feeding 5,000 guests daily!"

Fifty-six types of food are cooked daily, and in huge quantities. Thus other names of Puri are UCCHISTA KSHETRA and KABALYA KSHETRA. UCCHISTA means "leftovers," in this case food left over by the Lord.

KABALYA means "only." It is commonly used to mean MAHAPRASAD itself. "Only" eating MAHAPRASAD gives everything, including Moksha, or liberation itself. KABALYA KSHETRA is the only place where this MAHAPRASAD can be taken.





Other names of Puri reflect its deep spiritual power, names such as DASAVATARA KSHETRA, NITYA VAIKUNTHA, and GUHYA KSHETRA.

As a Vishnu temple, the figures of the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu, or AVATARS, adorn the main gate. The tenth avatar who is yet to come, the KALKI AVATAR riding the white horse, is often felt to be Lord Jagannath Himself. On His chariot for Rath Yatra, He is drawn by four white horses.

NITYA VAIKUNTHA means "the eternal abode of God, or heaven itself." Jagannath Temple is like the earthly home of God. Inside all activities of home life are carried out, but with the utmost purity and grandeur, as befits God Himself.

Puri is also called GUHYA KSHETRA because of all the divine mysteries surrounding Jagannath Temple. The word GUHYA means "mysterious, mystic."

In 1638 A.D., a severe epidemic of cholera spread through the town. No house was left untouched; many worshippers in the temple were dying off. All were worried about who would do puja.

Lord Jagannath's own Sudarshana chakra, in the form of a long log of Neem wood, was carried on the shoulders of worshippers all around the town. All the townspeople were miraculously healed and till today this rounding of Sudarshana is done once a year.

Once a poor villager by the name of Dasia Bauri from a distant village sent a simple coconut to be offered to Lord Jagannath. Only after leaving the temple did the rich pilgrims hold up his offering to the Lord inside the temple. It immediately "disappeared," and was found later on the altar at Lord Jagannath's feet. In the rarefied atmosphere of Puri, the impossible becomes possible!

*Opposite: Muslim and Hindu friends share MAHA-PRASAD of Jagannath Temple at Kabir Ashram in Puri. As the poet - saint Kabir taught, God is one and all can eat this holy food together, regardless of caste or creed.*





*To the direction of the Dahuka atop the horses, devotees pull a chariot to Gundicha Temple. People of Orissa fervently believe that to pull a RATH grants MOKSHA, or liberation.*









# THE PEOPLE AND THEIR TEMPLE

"RAKHE HARI MARE KIE,  
MARE HARI RAKHE KIE."

"If He troubles you,  
Who can save you,  
But if He saves you,  
Who can trouble you!"

"APANA HATA, JAGANNATHA."  
"Your own hand is Jagannath."

Oriya sayings about Lord Jagannath

Perhaps more so than any other city in India, Puri is truly a temple town. It was built around the temple of Lord Jagannath, and all duties and rituals of the various local organizations revolve around the temple. The temple of Lord Jagannath is the powerful magnet drawing people here.

In ancient days Puri was a town consisting only of temple worshippers, known as SEVAKAS, and monks, living in MATHAS devoted to spiritual life. At the end of the 15th century, seven streets, called SAHIS, were laid out, where the worshippers of the temple were to live. These sevakas even today perform specific duties according to family traditions.

As my family surname is Khuntia, my sons and I belong to the Khuntia Nijog. Khuntia sevakas are the bodyguards of the deities and collect flowers from devotees to be offered in the temple. There is still a street called Khuntia Sahi, although most Khuntias nowadays live in other

*Opposite: People of Puri stop at Lion's Gate to do NAMASKAR to Lord Jagannath on their way to work or school.*





*Worshippers of Jagannath Temple, called SEVAKAS, pull Lord Jagannath up to his chariot on RATH YATRA day.*

areas around the temple. Another street, Suara Sahi, was originally only for temple cooks, known as Suaras. The people who made clay pots for MAHAPRASAD lived in Kumbharapada Sahi. In olden days even the Devadasis had their own street, given by the king of Puri.

To insure discipline in the temple, duties were divided into two main groups, those of temple sevakas and other duties for temple Brahmins. These Brahmins perform no NITIS, or rituals, inside the temple. Rather they are the governing board for the rituals and the final authority on these matters. They also fix dates for all the important festivals of the temple.

Sitting on a raised platform, called MUKTI MANDAPA, to the left of the deities, they also

give advice and blessings to pilgrims daily. The kings of Puri designated sixteen villages outside of Puri for these Brahmins to live in. Called SASANAS, they are still a vital part of the temple community today, even though non-Brahmins live there now also.

Due to repeated invasions from foreign kingdoms, the kings of Puri established gymnasiums, called AKHADAS or JAGAGHARAS, to train young worshippers in the physical arts of self-defence. They became the soldiers defending the temple in times of Muslim invasion.

These Akhadas became the center of cultural activities as well, and towards the end of the 15th century, under King Prataparudra Deva and his Vaishnavite minister Ramananda Roy, the train-

ing of boy dancers, called GOTIPUAS, began in these wrestling clubs.

Thus it can be said that life in Puri has been shaped primarily by these five main groups, the NIJOGS of the temple sevakas, the MATHAS, the street SAHIS, the local AKHADAS or Jagagharas, and village SASANAS of Brahmin priests. The marvellous continuity between past and present that one experiences in Puri is due to their vitality today.

Of the more than 200 Nijogs inside Jagannath Temple, 36 are necessary daily. They are divided according to duties. Whereas the Brahmins who sit on Mukti Mandap have no actual temple duties, the sevakas of the various Nijogs must carry out all the elaborate NITIS, or rituals, of Jagannath Temple.

The cooks, belonging to Supakar or Suara Nijog, number more than 5,000. At least 500 work daily in the temple kitchens, preparing the 56 items of MAHAPRASAD every day.

The Brahmin priests of the Pujapanda Nijog perform a minimum of six pujas at the time of food offerings daily and more on special festival days. Members of the Singhari Nijog dress and decorate the deities in daily dress and special dresses, called VESHAS, for special occasions.

These VESHAS number more than thirty in a year, of which SUNA VESHA, or golden dress, HATI VESHA, elephant dress, and PADMA VESHA, or lotus dress, and NAGARJUNA VESHA, or warrior dress, are some of the most well known.

The Daitapati Nijog is considered the original "kin" of Lord Jagannath. They are not Brahmins, but of tribal descent. It is believed that NILA MADHAVA, the original form of Lord Jagannath, was worshipped by their forefathers.

The actual form of NILA MADHAVA is unknown. Some say He was a dancing Krishna and some say He was in the shape of four-armed Narayana with SANKHA, or conch, CHAKRA, or

spinning discus, GADA, or club, and PADMA, or lotus. Except for puja, the Daitapati Nijog takes full charge of the deities from SNANA PURNIMA through RATH YATRA every year, or for about one month.

In years when the forms of the deities are changed, the Daitapati members leave Puri in search of the new Neem wood, called DARU. They do not return until the DARU is brought. This is usually a period of at least one month. During this time they must cook their own food on wood fires and sleep outdoors under the open sky.

In 1996 the Neem tree for Lord Jagannath was found in a village near Khurda, some 50 kilometers from Puri. When the DARU was brought to Puri, a special wooden cart was made and pulled by sevakas and devotees. As the road to Puri is highly travelled in the daytime, they travelled mostly at night.

It was an amazing sight to see! A fire truck washed the whole road from Khurda to Puri, as the Lord would soon be passing in DARU form. For hours into the night local villagers carrying kerosene lamps lined the sides of the road waiting for a first glimpse of the "new" Jagannath.

As the cart approached, to the sound of GHANTAS, or cymbals, village boys pulled up their lungi dress in puja style and ran to help pull the cart. Cries of "Jay Jagannath" could be heard all the way, so much is Lord Jagannath the life and soul of the people of Orissa. A common saying is,

'BHAGABANANKU CHHADILE,  
SABU DUKHA ASE.'

"Thinking of anything other than God creates sorrow."

Not only the Daitapatis but all sevakas of the temple must observe the strictest discipline in matters of cleanliness and outside contacts.



If a worshipper is in seva cloth, walking to the temple, he cannot be touched by a dog, or pilgrim, not even by another worshipper! Temple dress must be simple; only a small yellow border is allowed on dhotis. He must wear a tulsi mala, but no watch or other jewelry is allowed. One must always be humble before God. One Oriya saying says,

“CHINIRE BALI MISILE KEBALA  
PIMPUDI ALAGA KARIPARE.”

“Only an ant can find the sugar in the sand!”

Members of the Pujapanda Nijog must learn by heart the whole puja system of Jagannath Temple, according to the ancient palm leaf text NILADRI MAHODAY. This takes one to two years to master.

One of the most difficult and dangerous physical duties of Jagannath Temple is putting the flags on the chakra on top of the temple. As the temple is more than 215 feet high, young worshippers of the CHUNERA NIJOG must climb more than 300 uneven stone steps to reach the top.

This is a stupendous task that they must do at least once daily, rain or shine, even after dark! Until the new flags are flying, no BHOGA, or food, can be offered. Only the two teenage sons of the Kunja Mahapatra family perform this duty today.

About one hundred years ago, one of the very young boys of this Nijog fell, but he cried out the name of mother Bimala and landed unhurt on a lion sculpture on the side of the temple. Because they are doing God's work, they feel Lord Jagannath will always protect them.

The word PANDA is derived from the Sanskrit word PANDIT, meaning “a very wise man.” When worshippers travel to different places of India, they take a picture of Lord Jagannath, pieces of His cloth, and dry MAHAPRASAD to distribute. People in these distant parts call them PANDA

THAKUR, or “the walking Jagannath,” just as the king of Puri is revered as THAKUR RAJA. They are not to take food in outside houses, but rather cook their meals themselves.

Most of the worshippers of Jagannath Temple even today are not highly qualified degree holders. A CHANAKYA sloka taught to children in their early years says,

“ATI GARBE HATA LANKA,  
ATI MANE KAURAVA,  
ATI DANE BALI BADHA.”

“Too much of anything destroys.”

According to this sloka, Ravana, the king of Lanka, was killed because he had too much lust; the Kaurava princes were killed because they had too much greed for power, and King Bali was killed because he had too much wealth and became too proud.

In Puri even too much education is felt to be bad because such boys will no longer wish to do temple service but go to distant cities for more lucrative jobs. On service days one spends a minimum of 18 hours in the temple.

Cooks work over hot wood-burning stoves with no fans, even today! All labor in the temple is very hard and sometimes tedious. Sevakas are paid only a token wage and depend on donations from pilgrims, or rather on Lord Jagannath for everything!

As a young sevaka, I was very skeptical, and also poor. Once I tested Him. It was Gundicha Day (Rath Yatra day) in 1972. I talked to the Lord like this, “So many sevakas are receiving donations, but not me. Only if I get 500 rupees in one hour will I believe that You are kind!”

No devotees were allowed close to the Rath, as there was a police cordon. Suddenly a very old lady from Uttar Pradesh called to me from the log under the chariot on which she was sitting. Afraid of the police catching her inside the cordon, she whispered, “Are you a Panda? I want to

## DAILY RITUALS OF JAGANNATH TEMPLE

- |                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| 1. DWARA FITA           | Opening of the doors at 7 a.m.   |
| 2. MANGALA ARATI        | Waving of the lamps  |
| 3. MAILAMA              | Change of Dress  |
| 4. SNANA                | Bath   |
| 5. MAILAMA              | Second change of dress   |
| 6. SAHANAMELA DARSHAN   | Opening the doors for devotees to view the deities without ticket, about 9-11 a.m.         |
| 7. MAILAMA              | Third change of dress and flowers  |
| 8. BALLABA              | Breakfast offering, about 10 a.m.  |
| 9. SURJYA PUJA and HOMA | In the Sun Temple  |
| 10. DWARAPAL PUJA       | Kitchen Puja   |
| 11. SAKALA DHUPA        | Morning rice offering, about 10-11 a.m.<br>(reaching Anand Bazaar for sale about 1-2 p.m.) |
| 12. BHOGA MANDAP        | Second rice offering, about 12-1 p.m. (reaching Ananda Bazaar for sale about 3-4 p.m.)     |
| 13. DWIPRAHAR DHUPA     | Afternoon offering of snacks, about 4 p.m.   |
| 14. MAILAMA             | Change of dress and flowers  |
| 15. SANDHYA ARATI       | Evening arati, about 6-7 p.m.  |
| 16. SANDHYA DHUPA       | Evening meal, about 7-8 p.m.   |
| 17. MAILAMA             | Change of dress and flowers, about 9-10 p.m.   |
| 18. BADASINGHAR VESHA   | Last decoration of the day, flower decoration and chandan lagi, about 10-11 p.m.           |
| 19. BADASINGHAR BHOGA   | Last food offering of the day, about midnight  |
| 20. PAHUDA              | Putting the deities to bed, about 1-2 a.m.*  |

\* This is the daily routine of the temple, but it is subject to change, especially on festival days.





*A young worshipper hangs new flags on top of Jagannath Temple daily.*



*As Jagannath Temple is more than 215 feet high, climbing up and down the uneven steps is a very dangerous task. Even at night and in the rain this seva must be done.*



ride the Rath and embrace Lord Jagannath. I may die soon, so please help me!"

I again thought of money as she looked very poor, as if she could not give one rupee even. So I said halfheartedly, "It is 200 rupees for each Rath." Immediately she took out 600 rupees from the knot in her sari. Small as I was, I pulled her up to the chariots. Out of sheer happiness she gave me an extra 100 rupees, that is, 700 rupees in total, all in less than one hour!

I had told Lord Jagannath that I would return home in one hour no matter what happened, but strangely I couldn't leave and stayed near Him all day. That day I tested the Mountain, but the Mountain also tested me!

So much attached to the temple are the worshippers that most cannot think of life without Lord Jagannath. Even today many know only two places, their home and the temple. When a sevaka dies, his funeral pyre is lit with fire from the temple kitchen itself.

There is a common belief among the worshipper community that in Sathya Yuga they were born as sages or seers, TAPI; in Tretya Yuga they were monkeys, or KAPI, working for Lord Rama; in Dwapara Yuga they were GOPIS, playing with Sri Krishna; and thus in Kali Yuga, they are now SEVAKAS to serve Lord Jagannath.

Not only worshippers, but all in Puri are extremely fond of the Lord's "leftover" food, called MAHAPRASAD. It is believed to have the power to heal, and grant liberation itself. Another saying of Orissa is:

"TANKA NA THILE BI PURIRE,  
CHHAPANPRAKAR BHOGA KHAI  
HEBA!"

"The man who doesn't have enough dal in his house boasts that he has just eaten 56 items of MAHAPRASAD!"

Although now Puri has grown in size and many

new neighborhood SAHIS have been founded, the seven oldest SAHIS are still closely connected with the temple. Whenever a meeting is held, MAHAPRASAD is taken; it guarantees 100% attendance! In Puri people say,

"There is no meeting, without eating!"  
(meaning MAHAPRASAD!)

The five MAHADEVAS that accompany the deities to CHANDAN YATRA belong to the various SAHIS. These Shiva Temples are maintained by their SAHI. They are as follows:

1. LOKANATH SHIVA -  
in Harachandi Sahi
2. KAPALAMOCHANA SHIVA -  
in Manikarnika Sahi
3. MARKANDESWAR SHIVA -  
in Markandeswar Sahi
4. NILAKANTHESWAR SHIVA -  
in Dolamandapa Sahi
5. JAMESWAR SHIVA -  
in Gourbat Sahi

On RAMA NABAMI day, the birthday of Lord Rama held in the spring, a special puja is done inside Jagannath Temple. But the glorious street festival, known as SAHI YATRA, is carried out totally by the seven oldest SAHIS. Started by them more than 500 years ago, SAHI YATRA celebrates all the divine events in the life of Sri Rama.

Each SAHI is responsible for a particular episode. Rounding the different streets, the SAHI actors reenact that event in full costume. In Sambalpur and Dhenkanal of Orissa dramas on the life of Sri Krishna and Rama are also presented for a week to ten days, but on a fixed stage. SAHI YATRA is the only street festival of Orissa, where "Sri Rama" and "Ravana" are actually moving through the streets!

The episodes enacted by the SAHIS are as follows:

## MAIN NIJOGS OF JAGANNATH TEMPLE

1. **MUDIRASTA**  
This sevaka officiates for the king of Puri in his absence. The Puri Raja is called the ADYA SEVAKA, the foremost sevaka of Lord Jagannath.
2. **CHATISHA NIJOG MAHAPATRA**  
This sevaka is the supreme authority of the temple and sees that all seva is carried out properly. He executes all orders of the temple government administrator and the king of Puri.
3. **BITARACHHA MAHAPATRA**  
He is the head priest of the temple for daily rituals, opening the doors in the morning and checking the purity of the temple kitchens.
4. **TALUCHHA MAHAPATRA**  
As assistant head priest, he seals the temple doors at night after PAHUDA and also checks the purity of the kitchens.
5. **PARICHHA NIJOG**  
They lead the procession of cooks carrying BHOGA from the kitchens to the main temple at all offering times.
6. **DEULA KARANA**  
They handle some accounting matters, such as distribution of donations and MAHAPRASAD to worshippers.
7. **TALUCHHA KARANA**  
He is the assistant accountant who keeps accounts of the temple storeroom, affixes temple seals, and posts dates of all special rituals.
8. **CHARCHIAT NIJOG**  
This sevaka reminds worshippers of their temple duty the next day.
9. **DAITAPATI NIJOG**  
Numbering about 200, these non-Brahmins are descendents of the tribal chief Bishwabasu, who first worshipped Lord Jagannath as NILA MADHAVA in the forest. Except for puja and cooking, they do all seva in the temple for one month, from SNANA PURNIMA to RATH YATRA.
10. **KHUNTIA NIJOG**  
They are the bodyguards of the deities and take offerings of flowers and cloths from devotees to the RATNA SINGHASANA altar. At PAHUDA time at night, they give the closing sloka, called MANIMA DAKA, before all leave the temple.
11. **PUJAPANDA NIJOG**  
They perform puja at the time of all NAIBIDYAS, or food offerings. This is the most difficult seva to learn. Slokas for all the elaborate rituals must be memorized. It takes about two years to master this puja system.
12. **BADA PANDAS**  
They are part of the PUJAPANDA NIJOG, but they do no temple seva. They serve as TIRTHA GURUS, or spiritual guides to pilgrims coming from all parts of India.
13. **MEKAP NIJOG**  
Some watch the temple storeroom, called BHANDAR. Others are in charge of the dresses for the deities which are kept in a huge basket, called CHANGADA. Another has the sole duty of keeping the AKHANDA DIPA burning 24 hours a day.
14. **PRATIHARI NIJOG**  
These worshippers enforce discipline among pilgrims and devotees inside the temple.
15. **GOCHIKARS**  
They guard the kitchen doors.



16. **VEENAKARA**  
At the time of putting the deities to bed, they play veena.
17. **MADELI**  
They play a long drum, called MADALA, during bedtime rituals.
18. **SANKHA NIJOG**  
They blow the conch at all pujas.
19. **KAHALIA NIJOG**  
They blow the bugle, called BIJE KAHALIA, at all auspicious events.
20. **GHANTUA NIJOG**  
They play big cymbals, called GHANTA, at BHOGA time and when deities come out of the temple in PAHANDI.
21. **PURANA PANDA NIJOG**  
They recite spiritual texts, such as PURANAS, BHAGAVATA, and GEETA inside the temple every evening.
22. **SINGHARI NIJOG**  
They dress and decorate the deities daily.
23. **SUARGADU NIJOG**  
They wash all puja utensils three times before each puja.
24. **PATRIGADU NIJOG**  
They check that all puja utensils are ready throughout the day.
25. **GARABUDU NIJOG**  
They bring water from the temple well to wash puja utensils.
26. **SUDHA SUARA**  
They put all puja items in their containers, for example, chandan in the chandan pot.
27. **MUDULI**  
They verify the number of puja utensils after every puja.
28. **HADAPANAYAKA NIJOG**  
They prepare the daily betel (Pan), for the Lord. It is offered after every meal and after the closing PAHUDA.
29. **TULSI NIJOG**  
They supply tulsi garlands to the temple daily.
30. **DAYANA MALIS**  
These gardeners supply scented flowers, both loose and in strung garlands, daily to the temple.
31. **MAHABHOI**  
They supply all milk-made items from their shops outside.
32. **PANIA-APAT**  
They wash the floor where BHOGA will be placed.
33. **BALITA SEVAKA**  
They supply wicks, or BALITA, for all arati and dipa lamps.
34. **KUMBHAR NIJOG**  
They make and supply all clay pots for MAHAPRASAD.
35. **BIMANABADU NIJOG**  
They carry all palanquins going outside the temple.
36. **CHITRAKARA NIJOG**  
They color and paint the faces of the deities, and "clean" their eyes with camphor daily.



*Flower garlands decorate Lord Jagannath's forehead, nose, hands, and heart. Here a PADATAKA for the heart is being made of nine flowers.*



## OTHER IMPORTANT NIJOGS

1. **SUARS**  
These are the cooks of the temple, numbering more than 5,000. They are the largest Nijog.
2. **VISWAKARMA NIJOG**  
They make the new deities at the time of NABAKALEBAR YATRA.
3. **MAHARANA**  
They build the chariots every year.
4. **RATHA DAHUKA**  
They direct the chariots during RATH YATRA from on top the wooden horses.
5. **BAHAR DEULA SEVAKAS**  
They do puja and care for the deities in all the smaller temples inside Jagannath Temple, such as mother Bimala, Lakshmi, Surjya, Krishna, Rama, and Ganesh temples.
6. **CHUNERA NIJOG**  
They take the flags daily to the chakra on top of the temple. Until the new flags are carried up, no BHOGA can be offered. It is perhaps the most physically challenging seva of the temple, as the chakra is 215 feet from the ground and 300 uneven stone steps must be climbed.

1. **RAMAJANMA**-Birth of Lord Rama, Baseli Sahi. On this day four little boys are dressed up as Lord Rama and his brothers Laxman, Bharat, and Satrugna. They go in a grand street procession to the temple.
  2. **PARSURAM MEETING**-Harachandi Sahi. The demons Maricha, Trisira, and Subahu are killed by the boy Rama. Then he meets Parsuram and they engage in a big fight.
  3. **MAYA RAVANA**-Dolamandap Sahi. Ravana comes in disguise to capture Sita.
  4. **SAMPATI BIRD**-Markanda Sahi. The Sampati bird flies Sri Rama and eight heroes, that is, Rama, Laxman, Hanuman, Sugriva, and four other monkeys who later aid Lord Rama in the battle to see Lanka, the home of Ravana where Sita is kept prisoner.
  5. **HANUMAN BURNING LANKA**-Daitapati Sahi.
  6. **VEERA RAVANA**-Bali Sahi. Rama kills Ravana in a big battle in Jagannath Ballab Matha.
  7. **RAMA ABHISEKA**-Gourbat Sahi. The coronation of Lord Rama.
- The actors go in costume to Lord Jagannath as part of the performance on all these days and ask for His blessings.
- Another great event of Puri is Durga Puja in October. Again it is mainly the SAHIS of Puri that



*During SAHI YATRA Festival a boy of a local Jagaghara dresses as Hanuman, carrying Rama and Laxman in victory while their Jaga mentor looks on.*



carry on this old tradition. Mother Durga images, some more than two stories tall, are built and decorated in SOLA and JARI KAMA and put on display in the local neighborhoods. BHOGA is offered to them and puja is done.

On the fifth night they are carried to Lion's Gate of Jagannath Temple. There in a line they await the Lord's blessings and all the local people of Puri come to view them. Then they are carried down Grand Road in procession for immersion in a local river, called MUSANAI.

The Gelabai mother of Manikarnika Sahi was once the personal deity of my forefathers. When this yearly tradition became too costly, our whole neighborhood took over the duties. Even in Jagannath Temple, SAHIS step in and help when a special tradition is about to be stopped, usually due to lack of funds.

Mother Bimala of the temple is decorated in different dresses, or VESHAS, showing different aspects of the Mother, for 16 days at Durga Puja time. In 1996 the BANA DURGA Vesha, or forest Durga dress, was to be discontinued due to lack of funds of that particular Bimala worshipper. But a rich family of a local SAHI took over the task in the name of their SAHI.

Thus the SAHIS of Puri have become the guardians of their culture. But it would not be possible for them to do so without the able-bodied support of the neighborhood gymnasiums. The SAHIS provide funds and organization, but the JAGAGHARAS do the actual physical work, for example, decorating and carrying mother Barabati Durga during DURGA PUJA celebrations.

Members assume the roles of Hanuman, Rama, and Ravana and learn the intricate dance steps, according to old traditions handed down through the JAGAGHARAS.

In the past not only wrestling and other forms of physical exercise were taught, but also Gotipua

dancing. Now no Gotipua boys are trained here, but two traditional dances are still taught and performed by JAGAGHARA members during SAHI YATRA and CHANDAN YATRA. They are DURGA MEDHA dances and NAGA dances.

DURGA MEDHAS are dancing mother DURGAS with 10-armed weapons. Some wear Durga masks made of SOLA covering the face while others use only traditional nose rings, called NATHA and GUNA, make up, and flowers. They carry actual weapons in their two hands. At least two DURGA MEDHA dancers are necessary for night-long dancing. People tell that when they dance, the actual power or energy of mother Durga comes to their minds and bodies.

NAGA dancers were warriors from the tribal areas of Orissa. The headdress of the NAGA dancer is said to charm the enemy like music does a snake. Tribals actually used a huge bright shiny flower found in the hills of Orissa as their hunter's headdress. Even lions and tigers were dazed by its brightness. For dancers this headdress is made of SOLA and JARI KAMA. The movements of this NAGA dance are slow and stately, and also very traditional.

Like the SAHIS, the JAGAGHARAS are the custodians of the culture of Puri. They are unique among wrestling centers of Orissa today. Not only do the Puri AKHADAS teach physical culture, they also teach spiritual discipline and values, and conduct puja to Hanuman, as Mahaveer, Lord of Great Strength. Traditional Oriya devotional songs and pakhawaj drum playing are also taught.

Special sattvic foods are cooked by the JAGAGHARA members for Hanuman Jayanti. In the winter wrestling season, another food is also prepared in the early mornings before exercise begins. Called PAHILI BHOGA, it is said to be the food that mother Yashoda fed to baby Krishna. These cakes made of bedi dal are also offered to Lord Jagannath in the temple during this season.

## MAIN JAGAGHARAS OF PURI

1. BARBATI JAGA - Harachandi Sahi
2. KRUSHNA KHUNTIA JAGA - :Lokanath Road
3. JAMI KHUNTIA JAGA - Lokanath Road
4. ISHWARA BALLAB JAGA - Lokanath Road
5. NURSINGHA BALLAB JAGA - Gourbat Sahi
6. BADA AKHANDA JAGA - Lokanath Road
7. SANKATA JAGA - Harachandi Sahi
8. PANCHUATI JAGA - Bali Sahi
9. GURU JANGA JAGA - Bali Sahi
10. DHWAJA GADA - Harachandi Sahi
11. KADAMBA GADA - Bali Sahi
12. CHAMPA GADA - Mochi Sahi
13. LUHA GADA - Dolamandapa Sahi
14. MAJANA JAGA - Grand Road, near Salebego Pitha
15. KHUNTIA JAGA - Khuntia Sahi
16. ADANGA TIADI JAGA - Harachandi Sahi
17. MALLI GADA - Dolamandapa Sahi
18. KHASU JAGA - Bali Sahi
19. TAPANGA JAGA - Harachandi Sahi
20. AMINA JAGA - Markandeswar Sahi

Even fathers today wish that all of their sons attend JAGAGHARAS. It keeps them off the streets and away from ladies, as no ladies are allowed there. My own father used to ask me constantly, "Why are you not going to the JAGAGHARA?" Even membership there is hereditary, passed on from father to sons, although others may join also.

My father did not have the physique of a great wrestler, but he was an excellent teacher. Recently he was remembered by one of his students, now about the age of seventy. This man

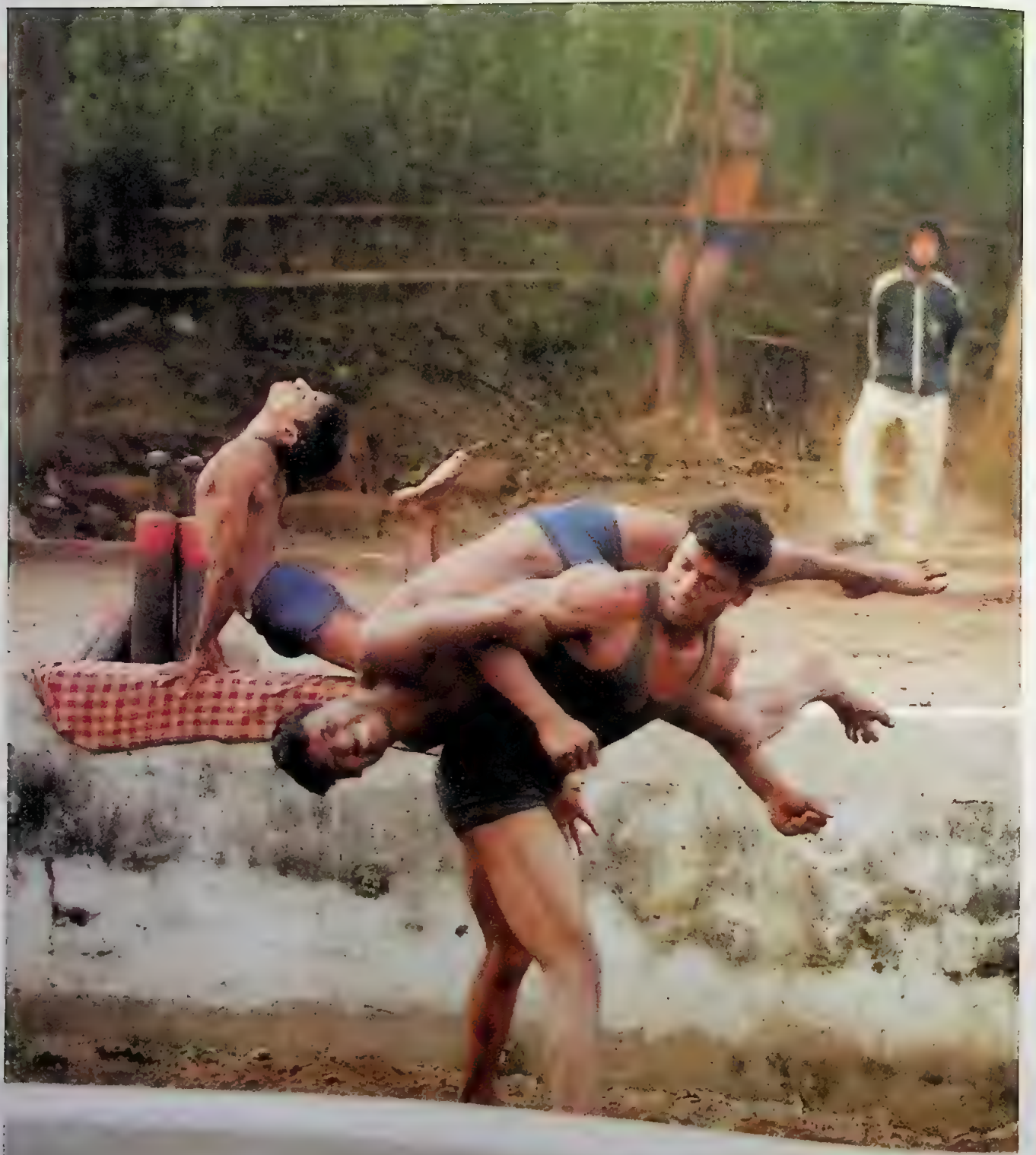
performed my father's Sraddha, or yearly death ceremony when I was absent from Puri.

He told me that my father taught him the value of right living. He recalled my father saying to him, "A house can be divided, so can property and wealth. Only health can never be split. Once gained, it must be maintained."

My father often said, "Tie yourself!" that is, limit one's contact with ladies and the outside world and eat only healthy foods, not meat, fish, eggs, tea, coffee, or cigarettes.

In JAGAGHARAS young men are told that





they may eat any food they want, but they should first offer it to Lord Jagannath! Milk, cheese, butter, and ghee are considered body-building foods for young wrestlers of Puri.

A powerful wrestler is said to have MAHABIRA (Hanuman) seated on his shoulder. He can swim ten kilometers in the ocean. But if one has contact with ladies, all that power is lost. They say in JAGAGHARAS, MAHABIRA gets down and the poor chap becomes a rocking horse for little children and a maid servant for his wife!

A special cloth GAMUCHHA is worn over the shoulder during the hot season. Called GAMUCHHA, it is soaked in fruit juice for seven days, then in oil for seven days, and afterwards in cheese water. It keeps the body cool during physical exercise.

Membership in JAGAGHARAS is life-long. Old men use them as meeting places and often play cards there. Many continue as gurus to teach the young both wrestling and music. Although now the swords are only worshipped, JAGAGHARAS once defended the temple. Another name is GADA, a place where soldiers stay. In 1603 the Muslim Taki Khan invaded the temple.

The BARBATI JAGAGHARA was made up mostly of Brahmin worshippers, whereas BADA AKHADA had mostly non-Brahmin non-worshipper members. Saying that the priests of BARBATI JAGA were too precious, as they did puja inside the temple, BADA AKHADA fought first. Out of respect for their bravery and self-sacrifice, members of this BADA AKHADA always lead the way in JAGAGHARA processions even today.

*Opposite: Members of JAGAGHARAS maintain strict discipline, rising at 4 a.m. and exercising until 7.*

During hot CHANDAN YATRA nights, JAGAGHARA members go to Narendra Tank together to take bath and make a huge feast of MAHAPRASAD. Along the way they are fond of singing,

"SOLA, PHULA, TELA, KHILA!"

"Give me a reed raft to hold onto,  
A flower garland to wear  
around my neck,  
Scented oil to smear on my body,  
And a bit of betel nut (pan),  
to chew on the way!"

More than 100 JAGAGHARAS are active in Puri today, but the most important ones are listed in the chart on the preceding page.

Just as the worshipper community observes at home the same rituals as in Jagannath Temple, albeit in a smaller way, so do the sixteen Brahmin villages, called SASANAS, surrounding Puri. Not only NITIS are done in the same way in these homes, but also festivals of Jagannath Temple. Because villagers cannot often go to RATH YATRA, small cars are made in many villages and pulled in procession.

A friendly quarrel continues between the Brahmin priests and Pandas. The Brahmins on MUKTI MANDAP say that they don't worship idols, but rather the formless Brahma. Sevakas reply, "Yes, but we worship Parabrahma Jagannath!"

Pilgrims touch the feet of sevakas, but sevakas touch the feet of MUKTI MANDAP Brahmins. Only they can give holy thread to sevakas and perform the SADHI BANDHA ceremony, which initiates a new sevaka into temple service. As the word SASANA suggests, they are the traditional "administrators" of the temple and as such still deal with all matters of rituals.



It is strange to say that even though no fixed time is set for these Brahmins to come and sit on MUKTI MANDAP, I have never seen it vacant! Usually 100 or more are sitting there daily. Such is their bond with Lord Jagannath. When one commits a sin, even murder, he can go to them for advice on how to overcome this.

How to control an unruly child, or an inattentive husband, every sort of question may be put by pilgrims. Often the answer is to do a special puja or visit a special temple weekly. Questions about temple rules, such as dress code, are handled by them only.

The sixteen Brahmin villages support the temple in other ways also. On special VESHA days, these villagers make huge crowns of tulsi leaves to be offered to the three deities.

In the holy month of Karthik (November), the sixteen villages offer a special BHOGA in the temple, called SOLASASANA BHOGA, that is, food from sixteen villages. Donations are collected in the villages and the BHOGA is distributed free to all.

As Karthik month is considered the holiest month in Puri, many poor widow ladies come from all over Orissa to do puja every day for one month. They eat only once a day, and that must be MAHAPRASAD, which is often this special SOLASASANA BHOGA, given free of cost.

The sixteen villages were established by the kings and queens of Puri. Some still bear their names. All are located at about a radius of 10 to 20 kilometers from Puri.

*Opposite: Harikrishnapur is the closest SASANA, or Brahmin village, to Puri. In olden days Brahmin priests walked to the temple from the village daily.*







In olden days these Brahmins used to walk back and forth daily to the temple, so they left Puri by sunset. But now due to good bus and train service, they sit on MUKTI MANDAP in the evenings also. The following is a list of the sixteen Brahmin Sasanas connected with Jagannath Temples:

1. VEERA HAKRISHNAPUR
2. VEERA PRATAPAPUR
3. SRI RAMACHANDRAPUR
4. VEERA RAMACHANDRAPUR
5. VEERA GOBINDAPUR
6. KAPILESWAR
7. VEERA DAMODARPUR
8. VEERA NARASINGHAPUR
9. VEERA BALABHADRAPUR
10. VEERA BASUDEVPUR
11. VEERA GOPINATHPUR
12. VEERA BISHWANATHPUR
13. VEERA PRATAPA RAMA CHANDRAPUR
14. VEERA PURUSOTTAMAPUR
15. SHREE PURUSOTTAMAPUR
16. VEERA HARIRAMPUR

Only the Sankaracharya of eastern India is superior to MUKTI MANDAP Brahmins in matters of rites and rituals of Hinduism. Actually the Sankaracharya often visits Puri and stays in Govardhana Pitha, one of the four PITHAS, or spiritual centers set up by Adishankar in the 9th century to preserve Hinduism.

Thus Puri is both a DHAMA, or holy place, and a PITHA, as the eastern center of Hinduism. It is also home to hundreds of active MATHAS, or monasteries, and ASHRAMS today. ASHRAMA means A, or "not," and SHRAMA, "tired or exhausted." An ashram is a place where a great guru lives. One goes there if tired of worldly life, to take shelter and learn of higher things.

The word MATHA means "late, or it will take some time." When the Buddha was asked many

spiritual questions by a seeker, he simply said, "Come and be with me." God takes time, or more precisely, it takes time for thoughts of the world to fade away!

Sometimes the words MATHA and ASHRAM are used interchangeably, but a MATHA is founded on a certain set of religious principles, such as Saivism, or Vaishnavism, more than by a guru himself.

Over the centuries more than 740 mathas have been founded in Puri. Some of the main mathas and ashrams of Puri today are listed in the chart on the following page. Some older mathas deserve more attention because of their close connections with the rituals of Jagannath Temple itself. Nowadays the Orissan government supports most of the rituals, but previous to Independence much of this huge cost was borne by mathas of Puri and devotees themselves.

EMAR MATH, founded by the great Vaishnavite saint Ramanuja in the 12th century, is still one of the richest mathas of Puri. Located directly opposite the main gate of Jagannath Temple, this matha makes certain flower garlands for the deities daily, to be offered at the time of the last vesha, BADASINGHAR VESHA. The flower garlands are GUNA and JHUMPA for the nose and ALAKA for the forehead.

Deuli Matha, which is outside Puri and under the control of EMAR MATH, houses the Daitapatis and other sevakas during their search for new wood, or DARU, for the deities in NABAKALEBAR YATRA years. A special rice is cooked for them there every day, called HABISANNA.

According to the temple RECORD OF RITES, BADA ORIYA MATHA which was founded in the 16th century by the great Oriya poet Jagannath Das, writer of the Oriya BHAGAVATA, supplies oil for temple dipas daily. This POLANGA oil costs about 1,000 rupees or more for 20 liters used daily.

Before RATH YATRA every year, BADA ORIYA





*Geer Swami Math in Bali Sahi is one of the many Vaishnava monasteries of Puri, this one founded by the followers of the great philosopher-saint Ramanuja of the 12th century.*



## IMPORTANT MATHAS AND ASHRAMS OF PURI

1. Angira Ashram	Sage Angira	Dolamandap Sahi
2. Bada Oriya	Utkaliya Vaishnava	Baseli Sahi
3. Bauli Matha	Guru Nanak	Bali Sahi
4. Bada Chhata	Ramanandi	Beside Lion's Gate
5. Chikiti Matha	Nimbarka	Baseli Sahi
6. Sri Ram Das Matha	Ramanuja	In front of Horse Gate
7. Dasavatara Matha	Ramanandi	Baseli Sahi
8. Emar Matha	Ramanuja	Opposite Lion's Gate
9. Falahari Matha	Avadhuta	Swarga Dwar
10. Gangamata Matha	Goudiya Vaishnava	Bali Sahi, Near Sweta Ganga Tank Lokanath Road
11. Giriharibanta Adwaita Bramhashram	Adwaita	
12. Gopal Tirtha	Adwaita	Bali Sahi
13. Govardhana Pitha	Adishankar(Saiva)	Swarga Dwar
14. Geer Swami	Ramanuja	Bali Sahi
15. Haridas Thakur Matha	Goudiya Vaishnava	Swarga Dwar
16. Jagannath Ballab	Vishnuswami	Grand Road
17. Jhanjapita	Goudiya Vaishnava	Suar Sahi
18. Kabir Chaura	Poet Kabir	Swarga Dwar
19. Karar Ashram	Yukteswar and Yogananda	Sea Beach
20. Kothabhoga	Goudiya Vaisnava	Bali Sahi
21. Languli Matha	Avadhuta	Bali Sahi Grand Road Opposite Snana Bedi
22. Mangu	Guru Nanak	Bali Sahi
23. Nigamananda Ashram	Guru Nigamananda	Swarga Dwar
24. Omkarnath Sitaram Das Ashram	Goudiya Vaishnava	Swarga Dwar
25. Papudia Matha	Ramanandi	Grand Road
26. Purusottama Matha	Goudiya Vaishnava	Swarga Dwar
27. Ramakrishna Mission	Ramakrishna	Collectoriate Road
28. Ramji Matha	Nimbarka	Bali Sahi
29. Radha Ramana Giridhar Kutir	Goudiya Vaishnava	Near Gundicha Temple
30. Radhavallavi	Nimbarka	
31. Radhakanta	Goudiya Vaishnava	Opposite Lion's Gate
32. Raghava Das	Ramanuja	Bali Sahi
33. Sankarananda	Saiva	In front of Horse Gate
34. Sana Chhata	Ramanuja	Bali Sahi
35. Sri Chaitanya Goudiya Matha	Goudiya Vaishnava	In front of Dola Bedi Grand Road
36. Suna Goswami	Goudiya Vaishnava	
37. Trimali	Ramanuja	Bali Sahi
38. Uttara Parswa	Ramanuja	Opposite Elephant Gate
39. Vrugu Ashram (or Bhrgu)	Bhrgu Rishi	Opposite Elephant Gate Gourbat Sahi

MATHA is vested with the duty of cleaning the RATNA BEDI altar of the temple and supplying a new applique canopy, called TRIMUNDI CHANDUA, at this ANASARA time. This matha gives the Lord's pillows also. It supplies black cloth to mother Bimala and a special BHOGA at the time of the festival of Rukmini's marriage to Sri Krishna.

A friend and follower of Sri Chaitanya, Jagannath Das left his family to become the first MAHANTA, or head monk, of this matha. BHAGAVATA books are supplied to the temple, and members of this matha read BHAGAVATA to groups inside the temple nightly.

RAGHAVADAS MATHA arranges special BHOGAS in the temple during SNANA PURNIMA, RATH YATRA, CHANDAN YATRA, and KUMAR PURNIMA. They make the bamboo shade covers for the deities during ANASARA, and the flower TAHIYA for the PAHANDI of the deities at RATH YATRA.

These special sevas came about because of the Lord's grace shown to the great yogi Ragavadas. In the 13th century, he meditated twelve years on the sea beach of Puri, regardless of rain or hot sun. He only stood there, never sitting or lying down even! People tried to protect him with a shade cover, but all were blown away by the wind.

Finally a sevaka from the temple, out of fun, brought him a used ANASARA shade from Lord Jagannath Himself. Amazingly, no storm could blow it away. In memory of this divine compassion, RAGHAVADAS MATHA has borne all costs of the ANASARA shade ever since.

Also the gorgeous flower crowns, called TAHIYA, worn by the deities as they emerge from the temple for RATH YATRA every year, are arranged by this matha for the same reasons.

During NABAKALEBAR YATRA time, a huge quantity of articles, as well as SARBANGA PANTI

BHOGA, used to be offered by them. This SARBANGA PANTI BHOGA is the last food offered to the old deities. Only after "eating" this BHOGA is the change of body performed.

Also a Ramanuja sect, GEER SWAMI MATHA supplies milk preparations of Khua and Papudi, and coconut for the daily morning BHOGA in the temple, called BALLABA PRASAD.

JAGANNATH BALLAB MATHA supplies all the fruits for this daily BALLABA offering. As it was founded to promote the philosophy of Lord Jagannath directly, it is perhaps the matha most closely linked to the temple. Situated on Grand Road itself, PANTI BHOGA is offered every time the deities pass by, such as at CHANDAN YATRA and RATH YATRA times.

At the beginning of NABAKALEBAR YATRA, the search party looking for the new DARU wood goes first in procession to JAGANNATH BALLAB for one and a half days. All final arrangements for the search are made there. During this stay, all expenses for MAHAPRASAD and other necessities are borne by this matha.

JAGANNATH BALLAB contains huge gardens and groves of coconut trees, from which they supply flower and tulsi garlands and huge amounts of fruits and coconuts daily to the temple. It is truly the gardens of "the great King."

The Vaishnavas of the renowned RADHAKANTA MATHA take part in Sankirtan singing on all important festival days of the temple. This matha used to supply chandan and flower PADAKA decoration for deities daily until the cost became too great for one matha to bear.

Another Goudiya Vaishnava Matha, JHANJAPITA MATHA does kirtan at early morning Mangala Arati and final Pahuda in the evenings. Outside the main doors of the inner sanctum, they engage in devotional singing at the times of BHOGA as well. As many as 500 hand cymbals are supplied by them for devotees to sit





*A devotee rolls in the dust of Grand Road upon seeing the deities at SNANA PURNIMA. Even the dust of Grand Road is considered holy as Lord Jagannath's chariot passes over it.*

and play at these times also.

TRIMALI MATHA supplies to the temple karpoor, or camphor for arati lamps, and jhuna powder for incense burning daily. There is even a JHADU MATHA to supply brooms for cleaning the temple! JHADU means "broom."

In the names of some mathas, the kings of Puri have allotted wood-burning ovens, or CHULAS, in the kitchens of Jagannath Temple. Certain Suara cooks prepare BHOGA on these fires as well as on their traditional ovens. This MATHA BHOGA is offered to Lord Jagannath and stored in SARAGHARA storeroom. From this storeroom mathas come and distribute the MAHAPRASAD to poor people on Grand Road daily.

Among the mathas supporting this daily poor feeding are: EMAR MATHA, BADA ORIYA MATHA, SANA CHHATA MATHA, and BADA CHHATA MATHA. The Mahantas of these mathas were once honored by the king of Puri for this special seva. In a special ceremony, called KHANDUA LAGI, he tied GEETA GOVINDA KHANDUAS on their heads.

According to tradition, the 13th day of a death ritual is celebrated with a feast of MAHAPRASAD for all family and friends. Every NABAKALEBAR YATRA year, the old deities are given this same rite. The only difficulty lies in the huge size of Lord Jagannath's family!

Called SUDDHIKRIYA of the deities, thousands upon thousands of Brahmins and sevakas are fed MAHAPRASAD on this auspicious day. The huge cost is borne by benevolent persons, sevaka nijogs, and many mathas of Puri as well.

Almost every great soul who visited Puri founded a matha or ashram on this sacred soil. Adishankar was one of the first, founding GOVARDHANA PITHA in the 9th century. The great philosopher saint Nimbarka started

RADHABALLAVI, RAMJI, and CHIKITI MATHAS. Guru Nanak of the Sikhs came to Puri and founded BAULI and MANGU MATHAS.

The poet saint Kabir started KABIR CHAURA. The saint Ram Das from Uttar Pradesh started RAM DAS MATHA. Ramanuja followers started many mathas to Sri Rama, foremost being EMAR MATHA, RAGHAVADAS MATHA, and UTTARA PARSWA MATHAS.

The number of Goudiya Vaishnava mathas left in the wake of Sri Chaitanya are too numerous to mention. Most well-known among them are HARIDAS THAKUR MATHA, RADHAKANTA MATHA, SRI PURUSOTTAMA MATHA, and SRI CHAITANYA GOUDIYA MATHA on Grand Road of Puri.

Today there are modern mathas or ashrams, such as SRI RAMAKRISHNA MISSION, OMKARNATH SITARAM DAS MATHA, and KARAR ASHRAM of Sri Yukteswar and his disciple Yogananda.

One of the most fascinating saints of India was Falahari Baba, in whose name FALAHARI MATHA in Puri was started. A great AVADUTA, or naked sadhu, he is said to have lived for more than 400 years.

In 1994 a newspaper article reporting his death, or MAHASAMADHI, showed a picture of him as he lived all those years, standing on a tree branch with one foot on a devotee's head. He only stayed there, in that holy tree, somewhere in Uttar Pradesh, and he lived only on fruits.

Now FALAHARI MATHA supplies fruit to Jagannath Temple in his memory. The first President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, was blessed by him in the years before Independence and told that he would soon become President of India.

Thus, mathas of Puri are holy places where all shades of religious faith converge. The monasteries were originally founded with the purpose of



imparting spiritual education to student disciples and feeding travellers, ascetics, and beggars.

They amassed vast amounts of landed property from donors in the past to be used to support specific BHOGAS and rituals in Jagannath Temple. When the Orissa government took over these duties, they also repossessed much of this property.

Consequently, the mathas of Puri today are not as rich and powerful as before. However, they still play a huge spiritual role in keeping the atmosphere around the temple holy and sanctified. Like all organizations of Puri, they still continue their time-honored seva offerings before Lord Jagannath, albeit on a smaller scale today.

Although Orissa suffered from repeated foreign invasions and domination for more than six centuries (from 1600- 1947 A.D.), the flow of pilgrims to Puri has never ceased. The lure of Lord Jagannath is irresistible.

Before the advent of bus and train, they came in thousands, walking. They had to cover hundreds of miles on rough roads and forest paths, crossing many unbridged rivers on the way. The fear of pestilence and highway robbery was always there.

During Muslim, Marathi, and early British rule, they had to pay a pilgrim tax as well. Some devout pilgrims traversed many miles by prostrating their whole body on the dusty road for every inch of the whole distance! Such practice can still be seen occasionally today on the highly-travelled road from Bhubaneswar to Puri.

Once inside the temple town of Puri, be he a bicycle rickshaw driver or the Chief Minister of Orissa, whoever passes by the main gate of Jagannath Temple stops and pauses for a moment in NAMASKAR. On the way to work in the mornings, we stop, even if late to work. On the way home from work, however tired we may be, we also stop.

People of Puri long to see Mangala Arati in the morning or Sandhya Arati in the evening in Jagannath Temple. They believe that if one sees these rituals for 108 days straight, one will himself become enlightened. Another fond saying of Orissa is this:

“KUSUMA PARASARE PATA  
NISTARE.”

“The thread is made holy  
Because it is part of the flower garland  
used by God.”

Through association with Jagannath Temple, not only very good and holy people, but the ordinary man too is uplifted.

*Opposite: In Bada Oriya Math, mother Subhadra of Jagannath Temple graces the JHULANA scene. Such is the close link between monasteries and temple in Puri.*











# THE PEOPLE AND THEIR UNIVERSE

"BAHUDI NIYAHE PRABHU,  
BAHUDA YATRARE  
DINA ASILA SARI,  
NAHIN ASHA JIBANARE..."

"Please take me with You  
to Your other home,  
You have come for this festival,  
and my days are over.  
I have no wish for this life any more."

Song of the great devotional singer,  
Banikantha Nimaicharan Harichandan

In my youth I used to travel with the great devotional singer of Orissa, Nimaicharan Harichandan, all over the province to every village, to bhajan gatherings everywhere. I would speak something about the rituals of the temple and then he would lead all in inspiring songs that he had composed to Lord Jagannath. He was also in the habit of visiting the temple daily.

On one of his morning visits, I met him and praised him profusely, saying, "Such a great devotee, why do you bother about coming to the temple?" To this day I remember his exact reply, "Let no one call me a great devotee of God unless I die with His name on my lips!"

Some fifteen years later he sang the above song on the day of Car Festival in 1985. The song continues,

"To live in this century is difficult,  
The sooner we die, the better.  
I have seen and experienced many things.  
Now let me die peacefully..."

*Opposite: A very unusual DURGA MEDHA dances for this CHANDAN YATRA festival. Called an ARDHANARISWARA DURGA, she is half-male Shiva, and half-female Parvati.*



So singing this song, the old man died.

Truly speaking, this whole universe is a metaphor for something else, as the Chilean poet Pablo Naruda once said. People of all cultures must find a way to connect themselves with the universe around them.

In Puri this is done mainly through JATRA, or yatra. The word JATRA means "festival," and there are more than 96 festivals held in Puri every year by the devotees of Lord Jagannath, perhaps more than in any other temple of India.

A favorite saying among people of Orissa is that no one is wealthy because every month there is a religious festival to celebrate! Either it is connected with a special ritual in the temple, or the change of seasons, or an especially auspicious configuration of planets. The dates of all these grand occasions are calculated according to the Indian lunar calendar, and are listed in the yearly almanac, called PANJI.

Festivals, in general, express the hopes and aspirations of a people. The old meaning of the word JATRA was "journey." It is still used in this context today. According to SKANDA PURANA, written in the 6th or 7th century, there were twelve important MAHA JATRAS, or DEVA JATRAS. The word JATRA seems to have been used because of the ceremony of going in procession, which precedes worship.

Almost all the festivals of Orissa have a deep spiritual connotation. They include formal worship, or puja, or some kind of vow-taking, called BRATA. They are like a bridge for man to easily cross from the utterly physical to the truly spiritual.

To experience our true nature, we must live deliberately. We must live in harmony with the natural laws. Through festivals and BRATAS we align ourselves with the forces of the universe and can never become their victim!

The biggest festival of Orissa is the great Chariot Festival, called RATH YATRA, at the end of June. It is worship on a grand scale, in which all can participate, Hindu and non-Hindu alike,

regardless of creed or caste. It is also meant as a "journey," a summer excursion for the deities to the smaller Gundicha Temple, after their being "ill."

People in Puri treat God in general, and Lord Jagannath in particular, just like a man. So what is true to man must also be true to God. JHULAN YATRA, or the Festival of Swings, is a recreation of the love play of Radha and Sri Krishna during the rainy monsoon season when no one goes out. The two idols are placed on gorgeously-decorated swings and devotional songs are sung as the swing is pulled.

CHANDAN YATRA in May is a festival of the same nature, in which representatives of the deities are taken for a boat ride during the hot nights of summer. Such festivals are meant for the glorification of God; this is felt to be man's greatest pleasure.

SNANA PURNIMA is the annual ceremony of bath-taking. The three deities of Jagannath Temple are given bath with 108 pots of sweet-smelling holy water. It represents the rites of purification and renewal. After this excessive bath-taking, they are said to fall ill from too much cold water and for this reason they are treated like sick persons for 15 days.

The great NABAKALEBAR YATRA, meaning "new body," is the festival held only once every 12 to 16 years, when the wooden forms of the deities are made anew. The old forms are actually buried, as if they had died. Their death ceremony is observed in the homes of the worshipper community as if a family member had died.

The lives of the people of Puri are shaped from very childhood by this festive mood of the temple, and by these many festivals which have been maintained by them from time immemorial. To the Vaishnavites of Puri, all of these festivals are felt to be the reenactment of the divine pastimes of Sri Krishna and the gopis in the modern age.

The following is a list of the major festivals of Puri. As the timings are based on the Hindu lunar



*On SHAMBADASAMI lakhs of people arrive at Chandrabhaga River near Konark to do puja to the sun at dawn.*

calendar, the exact dates may change slightly from year to year. In the words of the great Oriya singer Banamali,

"BARA MASA, TERA JATRA  
DEKHUTHEEBI,  
SHREEKSHETRA HOI  
BHIKARI!"

"In twelve months, there are thirteen  
festivals in Puri,  
So I will become a beggar in this  
holy place!"

Although sun worship is done daily in Jagannath Temple before lighting the fires in the

temple kitchen, a special sun worship is done in the winter month of January. In the temple and homes of Puri, these rituals are observed every Sunday for one month.

The concluding day is called SHAMBA-DASAMI. This is the main day of the year for sun worship. Inside the temple grounds of Jagannath Temple, there are five main smaller temples, dedicated to elephant-headed Ganesh, the god who removes all obstacles, Narayana Vishnu, Mahadeva Shiva, mother Bimala, a form of the divine mother Durga, and Surjya, the sun god. It is stated in the ancient text, PUROHITA SARVOSWA.

"GANE, NARAYANE, RUDRE,



AMBIKE, BASKARE TATTHA.  
VINNA VINNA NA KARTAVYA..."

"All these forms of God  
Are not different from  
Lord Jagannath Himself."

But of all forms of worship, sun worship is the most ancient. It began in Vedic times.

Later in the month, or in the beginning of February, according to the arrangement of planets in the Hindu calendar, the second great festival to the sun occurs. More than 30,000 pilgrims come to the banks of Chandrabhaga River near Konark to take bath before dawn. In olden days they used to come on foot.

This day is called MAHGA SAPTAMEE, and is the concluding day of SHAMBADASAMI PUJA. Shambu was the son of Sri Krishna and Rukmini. When a child, he made fun of a great sage, Astabhakra, whose name meant that he was deformed in eight parts of his body. This angry sage then cursed the boy to suffer from leprosy. He was told to worship the sun and he would be cured. On the banks of this holy Chandrabhaga River, he meditated and was healed.

In memory of this miracle, huge numbers of people begin assembling here some three days before. For spiritual cleansing and good health for their families, they take bath and worship the sun at dawn. Whether they go to Chandrabhaga or not, ladies of Puri prepare special cakes in the name of their children to be offered to the sun at dawn on this day and then eaten by the child. In olden days each child had a different kind of cake chosen by his mother at his birth.

I can remember my own mother getting up at 3 a.m., taking bath, and in wet dress, she prepared these special cakes for us three children. For me, she used to make a very thin paper-like chakuli pitha, called KANTI. No lady today can make it; this pitha is so difficult.

In the name of my elder brother, she made PAPUDI KHAJA, a Greek Baklava type of sweet

filled with fresh cream. For my sister, there was always LABANGA LATA, a sweet cake with one piece of clove on top.

My mother made more than 50 of each variety and carried all the cakes to the verandah herself for offering to the sun. Today it is too costly to make so many cakes. Most houses only do CHAKULI PITHA, which is an Orissan dosa. But in my childhood, we ate perhaps 30 kinds of pitha on SHAMBADASAMI day!

The cakes my mother prepared were distributed to all the neighbor houses and in return we received other cakes from them in the name of their children. For the next two days, no rice was cooked; we ate only pitha. So many cakes were there!

Also in memory of SHAMBADASAMI, the great Konark Temple itself was built to worship the sun.

The month of January is called PUSYA, because of the influence of this star at this time. PUSYA ABISEKA is the annual coronation ceremony of Lord Jagannath in the temple. According to the palm leaf text, NILADRI MAHODAY, Jagannath is PARAMESWARA, the supreme Lord, and must be installed like the king of kings:

"EMBAM CHA PARAYA BHAKTYA,  
TOSHAYE PARAMESWARAM,  
AVISEK UTSHAB JE BAI,  
PASYANTI BHUBI MANABA."

"To His devotee,  
Lord Jagannath is PARAMESWARA,  
In His coronation,  
He should be installed  
as King of Kings!"

In the last decoration of the day, all three deities are given new dress and full golden ornaments. Earlier new holy thread was given and now a special BARUNA PUJA is done, in which all the gods are invited to attend.



*Mothers prepare special cakes for each child in the family on SHAMBADASAMI day.*

In the smaller Nrisingha Temple, a special holy fire ceremony, called NRISINGHA YAGNA, is held, because according to mythology, the forms of the Trinity first appeared in such a yagna. The king of Puri must be present there, and as a token of blessing, three holy threads of the deities are given to him. This is called YAGNA UPABITA.

MAKARA SANKRANTI is the New Year Festival in Orissa, and in much of India. This is the rice harvest time, the first rice being harvested on this day. SANKRANTI refers to a certain configuration of planets every month which is considered inauspicious and liable to have bad effects. So every month fasting and HOMA, or holy fire ceremonies, are done in many homes.

But MAKARA SANKRANTI is the biggest

Sankranti of the year. MAKARA means "balance or equal." On this day only, the length of the day and night are equal. A special dish of uncooked flattened rice is prepared in the temple and most homes.

Only this MAKARA CHAULA can be offered by outsiders in Jagannath Temple itself and then distributed to all. This is because all rice harvest is considered to be Lord Jagannath's property and the first rice is offered to Him before any is cooked.

MADAN MOHAN, two dancing Krishnas, are carried in a palanquin around the town, as Lord Jagannath's representatives, accepting offerings of MAKARA CHAULA from all the houses.

I myself am very fond of MAKARA CHAULA. My father was poor and very tight with his money,



so he used to mix more rice and use only half a coconut. I didn't like this dull taste. So in 1964 when I received my first teaching appointment, I also began to make MAKARA CHAULA. From that day onwards, we had two MAKARA CHAULAS in our house. I bought all the fancy ingredients; and because mine tasted so good, I kept it locked in the almirah and only distributed it to house members!

My father distributed his to all! He always told me that his was better. Mine was impure and polluted and would never be accepted by the Lord. I wore sandals and brought the ingredients home in a bicycle rickshaw (my father never once sat in one). My father made his in a clay pot and carried it barefoot to the temple himself. He used to say, "I am making MAKARA CHAULA for Him. You have made yours for yourself only!"

MAKARA CHAULA is prepared in this way:

#### MAKARA CHAULA

1. Flattened rice - 1/2 kg. rice soaked for three hours, drained, and smashed to flattened pieces
2. Shredded coconut -two
3. Cottage cheese - 1 kg.
4. Cream - 1/2 kg.
5. Sugar - 1/2 kg.
6. Good ghee - 250 grams
7. Raisins -200 grams
8. Cardamom - 100 grams
9. Camphor - 2 small pieces
10. Papudi cake (made of cream) - 1 (big, and pizza-sized).
11. Khua (a milk dish slowly cooked until very thick) - 250 grams

Mix all the above ingredients together thoroughly.

To Sri Lakshmi, mother of Wealth, a special puja is done on every Thursday during the winter harvest season. It is called GURU PANCHAMI. GURU refers to Thursday, GURUBARA, which is the day of the week reserved for Lakshmi worship

(as well as Guru Puja).

But for these five special Thursdays, only ladies of the house do this special puja. Special foods are prepared and offered, as Sri Lakshmi is also known as GRUHALAKSHMI, mother of the home, who is in charge of cooking and bestows peace and prosperity on the family. The main BHOGA can only be taken by house members, although additional preparations may be distributed to all.

On the full moon day in the month of February, a very ancient rite may be observed on all cross-roads of Puri. Huge fires are lit at dusk, into which are offered fruits, coconuts, flat rice, or CHUDA, and a special flat rice, called KHAEE. This day is called AGNI UTCHHABA. AGNI means "fire," or TEJA, one of the five elements of nature necessary for life. UTCHHABA is another word for festival, or celebration. Fire worship is one of the oldest forms of worship, originating in Vedic times.

It is said that for human life two fires are necessary, AGNI DUNIA. DUNIA means "world." When a baby is born, a fire is needed to heat the mustard oil that is rubbed on his body. At the time of death, the body is burned. Inside the temple, at the AGNI TEMPLE, and at the four gates to the temple, fires are also started. At the AGNI TEMPLE inside, a huge fire is kept burning in front of AGNISWARA MAHADEVA, a black stone Shiva in yoga posture, and puja is done.

One of the holiest days in India, MAHASHIVARATRI occurs in February or early March on the darkest night of the year, when there is no moon at all. At Lokanath Temple, dedicated to Lord Shiva, devotees meditate and sing bhajans throughout the night. As the influence of the moon and planets is said to be at their lowest on this one night every year, it is the most favorable time for granting liberation, or MOKSHA.

According to SHIVA PURANA, Parvati meditated on this night and got Lord Shiva Himself as her husband. On this night in Puri, it is said that



*A foreign visitor and local boy spray each other with colors during HOLI Festival in the spring.*

Lord Jagannath and Lord Shiva meet and become one again,

"EKA BRAHMA, BOHUDH BHAVANTI."

"From One (Brahma), I have become many."

This meeting is enacted in a huge procession, called HARIHAR BHETA. HARI, or Lord Jagannath, is Vishnu, the maintainer of the universe. HARA is Lord Shiva, the dissolver of the universe. The small golden image of Lokanath Shiva that guards the Jagannath Temple storeroom is taken as a representative of Lord Jagannath to Lokanath Shiva. There He "meets" with Lord Shiva.

A sweet, called KHAJA, is prepared in many homes, taken to Lokanath Shiva, and offered and

then distributed to all. No outside food, except MAKARA CHAULA once a year, can be given in Jagannath Temple, yet Lord Jagannath is felt to be the softer of the two, like the head of the household. Any promise made to Lokanath Shiva must be kept, whereas Lord Jagannath is more lenient.

On the full moon day in the month of March, DOLA PURNIMA, the spring festival of HOLI, is celebrated all over the country. But in Orissa this is the culminating day of five days of celebrations. Images of Gopi Krishna and Radha and Madan Mohan, the two dancing Krishnas, are carried on decorated palanquins around the temple streets. Food is offered from the houses as they pass by.

They are then placed on richly decorated swings on DOLA BEDI outside the temple. Sevakas throw colored powder at them as they



are swung. This is said to be a reenactment of the play of Krishna and the gopis in Brindavan in springtime. It is stated in PADMA PURANA, "One is expiated of all sins, if he gets a vision of Sri Krishna swaying on this swing."

As soon as the HOLI days are over, Orissa's traditional drama, called PALA, begins on DOLA BEDI. Two PALA parties, consisting of six members each, compete every night for twenty one days. They are expert not only in story telling, but also in sloka recitation, singing and acting.

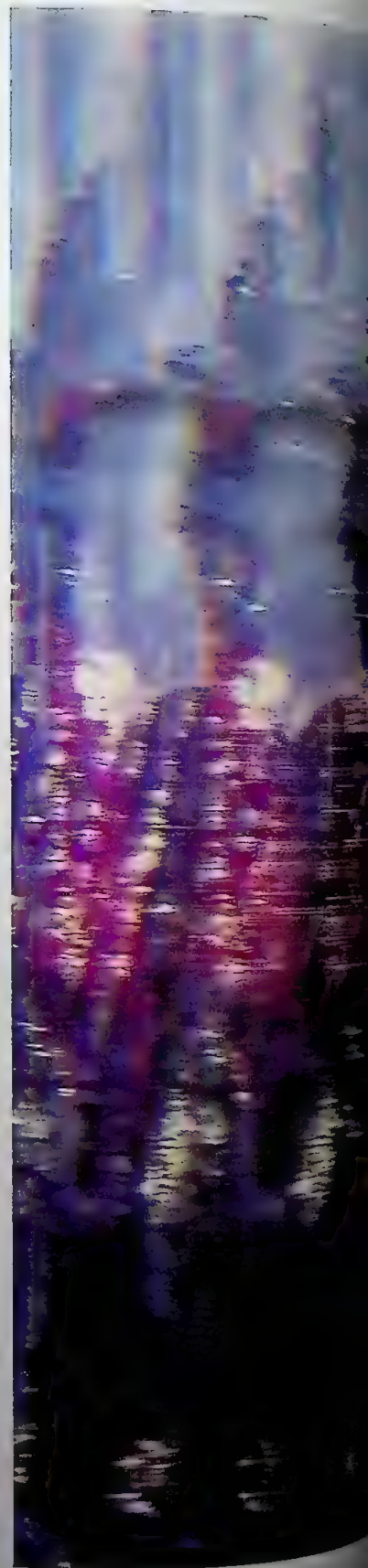
The leader, called GAYAKA, knows by heart hundreds of slokas from GEETA, RAMAYANA, the SHASTRAS, and PURANAS. I used to sit for two or three hours every night. My father was very happy with this activity of mine.

He would say, "That GAYAKA is the son of Saraswati Herself (the mother of Learning). He has memorized so many things and he never forgets. You be like that!"

One of the most important and unique festivals in Puri is the nine-day long street festival of SAHI YATRA, celebrating the birth of Lord Rama in April. As this was one of the ten incarnations of Lord Jagannath on earth, the whole story of the RAMAYANA is staged in street processions.

Beginning with the birth of Lord Rama on the ninth day after the full moon, or NABAMI, it shows the defeat of Parsuram by Lord Rama. The people of different jagagharas take various traditional parts on different days. The capture of Sita, Hanuman setting fire to Lanka, and Rama finally killing Ravana, all are enacted throughout the whole night for nine days.

Traditional weapons, such as swords and



*Opposite: Ten headed Ravana dances through the streets of Puri for SAHI YATRA, until he is "killed" by Lord Rama on the ninth night.*









*To conclude SAHI YATRA Festival, a small boy dressed as Lord Rama "kills" the demon Ravana.*

spears, and old silver jewelry are kept by the jagas for such occasions. In the past, worshippers who belonged to these wrestling centers were the bodyguards and soldiers of the temple. On the last day, after the killing of Ravana, young men dressed as Rama, Laxman, Sita, and Hanuman and their followers go before Lord Jagannath to take His darshan.

My father never went anywhere, but for the nights of SAHI YATRA he was always in the front row on the verandah! He used to scold me because I never went to the jaga for physical exercise. He wanted me also to go in procession to Bali Sahi on SAHI YATRA nights, as one of the soldiers of Lord Rama.

All the jagaghara members in those days participated, dressed in gorgeous silk PATAS, waving swords, spears, and latti sticks, some even riding horses. More than fifty dancing DURGA MEDHAS and NAGAS led the processions, whereas now there are only one or two. My father used to say, "You are slumping! You go to SAHI YATRA and walk like a VEERA PURUSHA, a great hero!"

Once he decorated me himself, with black painted eyebrows and a big red line of sindhur up my forehead. Around my neck he hung a solid gold necklace, borrowed from a relative. Today that necklace would cost more than 4 lakh, or 400,000 rupees!



For the wrestling centers of Puri, another great event occurs in this month, the birthday of the monkey god, Hanuman. This is called MAHAVIRA JANMA, as Hanuman was supposed to have supernatural strength. He is worshipped as the god of Strength and foremost servant of the Lord. Thus, he is the main deity in the more than one hundred jagagharas of Puri. On this day, the older wrestling teachers are honored, and friendly competition is held between them and their young students. In the evening, the jagas hold a feast of MAHAPRASAD and sing devotional songs to Hanuman.

As Jagannath is said to be Sri Krishna for Kali Yuga, all the great events in the life of Sri Krishna are also remembered in Puri. In May, the "marriage" of Sri Krishna to Rukmini is held inside the temple in front of the small Lakshmi Mandir.

It is stated in RUKMINI PARINAY that from childhood Rukmini only wanted to marry Krishna. But her father was forcing her to marry a wealthy prince Sishupala. So on the day of her marriage, Sri Krishna came and kidnapped her.

Every year the sword battle between Sri Krishna and Sishupala is reenacted by sevakas, and Sishupala is chained to Krishna's chariot. In the past, a DEVADASI used to speak the dialogue of Rukmini at marriage time.

An actual marriage ceremony is performed. Then Krishna and Sishupala go outside the temple, Sishupala in kingly dress, but in chains, and Sri Krishna, dressed as a simple worshipper. They visit all the mathas and neighborhoods surrounding the temple.

RUKMINI'S MARRIAGE DAY brings to mind a very fond memory of my youth. In some years my father used to be Krishna, as this part is taken by a member of our Khuntia Nijog. With a huge crowd watching, he used to display his sword-fighting skills in the fight with the man who played Sishupala every year.

When I was about fifteen, that man called me one day from his milk shop near the temple. "Are you the son of Harihar Khuntia?" he asked. Then

he amazed me by saying, "I will give you 1/2 kg. of cream every day for one year!" At first he would not tell me why. Finally, he confessed, "Such a fine dashing Krishna I have never fought with before!"

My father was a guru in our local jaga, teaching not only wrestling but also traditional NAGA and DURGA MEDHA dances as well as sword-fighting to the boys. So he was very expert in this art. I gave the cream to my father. As always, he connected everything to my learning process. "You should learn kindness from that Sishupala!" he said.

For residents of Puri, one of the most significant days of the year is AKSAYA TRUTIYA in May. AKSAYA means "no loss." Whatever work is started on this day, it is felt that work must be successful.

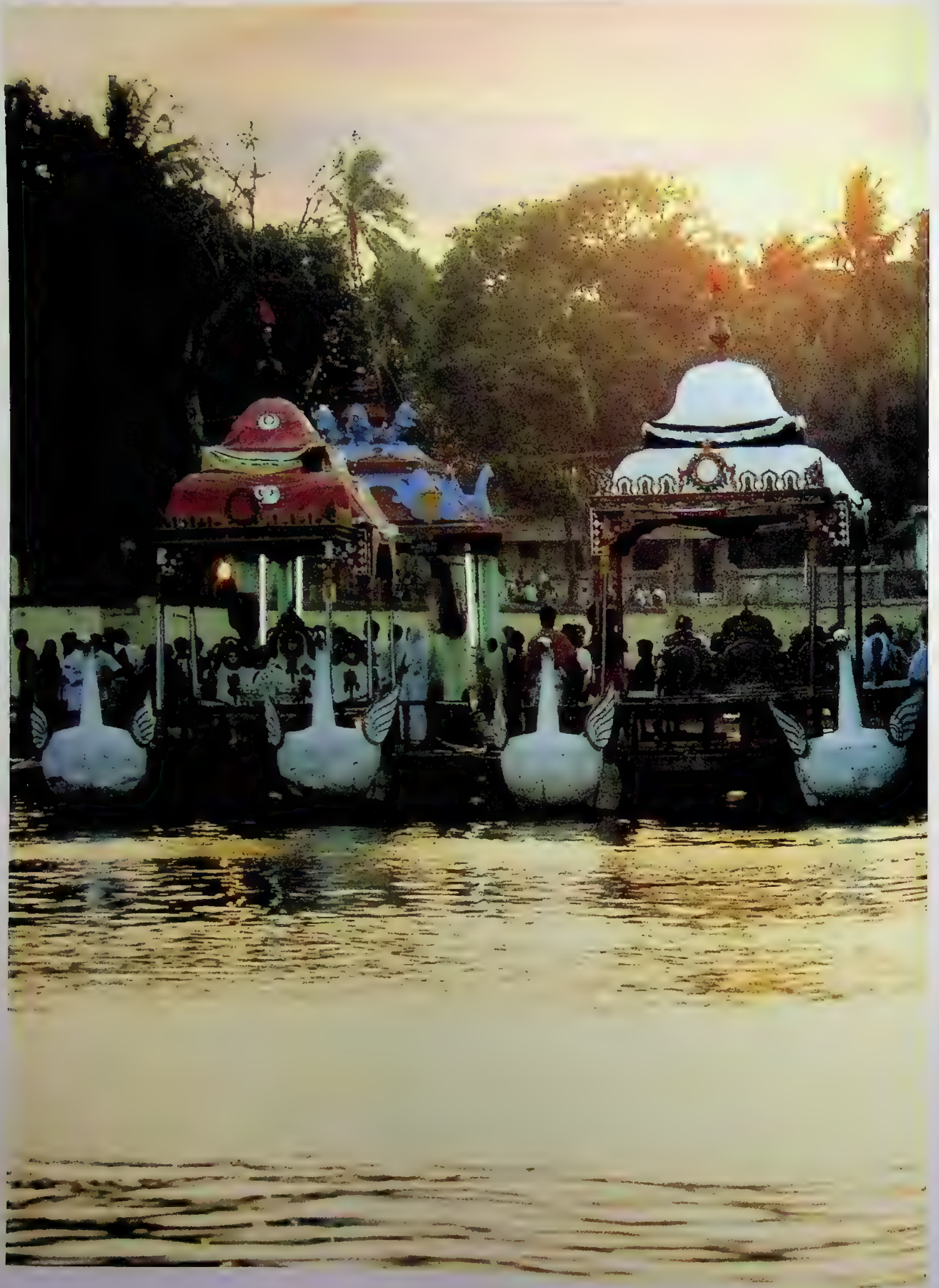
Thus, this day is often chosen for the construction of new houses, the beginning of new businesses, marriages, and many important events. It is a day set aside for worship of mother Lakshmi. Mothers fill many small painted clay pots with sweets and distribute them to children in the neighborhood.

All the work for the great Car Festival at the end of June begins from this day. In front of the King's Palace, puja is done to the logs that will be used to build the chariots. Only after this does the cutting of the logs begin.

The summer festival of CHANDAN YATRA begins from this day also. To relive the summer boat ride of Radha and Krishna down the River Jamuna in Brindavan, the deities are taken in procession to Narendra Tank and floated on beautiful boats for 21 nights in summer.

The actual deities do not go, but Gopi Krishna with Radha and MADAN MOHAN, the two dancing Krishnas, go as their representatives. The five representatives of the five main Shiva temples of Puri accompany them. They are LOKANATH SHIVA, KAPALA MOCHANA SHIVA, JAMESWARA SHIVA, NILAKANTESWAR SHIVA, and MARKANDESWAR SHIVA.







Seven palanquins are decorated with the most beautiful flowers and amidst dancing DURGA MEDHAS and NAGAS the procession proceeds nightly. A worshipper traditionally dresses as Nanda, the foster father of Krishna, and with many small gopas and gopis, he dances in front of the procession.

The king's elephant leads the way, decorated as GAJALAKSHMI, mother Lakshmi in elephant form, her ears gorgeously painted. On the next to last night, the boats round the tank 21 times. All of this festival is in memory of the JALAKRIDA, the water play of Radha and Sri Krishna.

Families make picnics there; members of wrestling centers take bath in the tank and make feast there. Small boys swim alongside the boats. In Puri, it is not man, but God, who is given the boat ride.

Among the worshipper community, it was the custom in the past that if a small boy was saved from fatal illness, he would be offered to God in token service on the boats at this time. Dressed as a DEVADASI, or GOTIPUA dancing boy, he "danced" before the deities as they rounded the lake. In much earlier times, DEVADASIS actually sang songs from GEETA GOVINDA on the boat.

On each day of CHANDAN YATRA, one Khuntia sevaka has the chance to ride the boats around the lake and throw flowers to the deities seated there. The first time I was allowed to do this seva, I had this experience. As I was tossing the flowers, I felt as if the flowers were coming from above, and I was just watching.

My father later said that devas come and offer flowers also. On the night of 21 roundings, it took two hours. I could not move one inch even from

my traditional place. Strangely also, even though I threw the small white flowers for two hours to the deities on the altar, I never felt a shortage of flowers!

In my father's old age, he still walked daily the long distance to Narendra Tank. He tried to go on a boat all 21 nights, giving the plea, "You are all so young. I will die soon, so give me one more chance!"

The birth ceremony of Lord Nrsingha, the fourth Avatar, is also held inside the temple in May. His birthday is especially significant in Puri for according to mythology, the forms of Jagannath, Balabhadra, and Subhadra were first seen in the fire of a Nrsingha Yagna.

Especially popular in the villages surrounding Puri is the marriage of Lord Shiva and Parvati in June. Actual marriage is performed; then the murti of Lord Shiva is placed on a clay bull and the murti of Parvati is placed beside him. They are carried in procession through the village. A free feast is held for all.

The five MAHADEVA SHIVAS of Puri are also "married." Their representatives with Parvati are carried to Lord Jagannath for blessing. This festival is called SITAL SHASTHI. SITAL means "cool," and it is held on the sixth day of the new moon, SHASTHI. It is believed that Lord Shiva was cooled down only by marriage with Parvati!

At the beginning of the rainy season in June, the planting festival of RAJA SANKRANTI is held. On this Sankranti Day, mother Earth is said to be in period. After that day she will be fertile and crops will grow. For three days young unmarried girls are honored. They do no work or cooking and only play on big swings hung from the trees.

On the first day, little girls are dressed in new clothes, and beautiful CHITTA designs are painted on their foreheads with the hope that they will be mothers one day too. On the second day, the DOLIS, or swings, are hung, and all the ladies sing songs and dance around them. On the third

*Opposite: The deities of the temple are floated around Narendra Tank twice daily for twenty-one days during CHANDAN YATRA in the hot summer.*



the third day, the ladies make a special cake for all to eat, known as RAJA PITHA, and offer fruits in mother temples.

On the full moon day in June, the great bath festival of the deities takes place. This is called SNANA PURNIMA. As man takes bath to purify the body, God takes bath to purify the whole world. The three wooden deities are given actual bath with 108 pots of holy water on a special altar, known as SNANA BEDI.

This altar is on the outer wall of the temple, so all can see this grand event from the street of Grand Road itself. This is the only time in the year that the deities are given a real bath. On other days water is poured on their reflection in silver mirrors.

The water with which Lord Jagannath is given bath is not ordinary water. It is taken from a well inside the temple, called SUNAKUA, or Golden Well. On no other occasion is water from this well used. It is carried in 108 clay pots, into which are also mixed sweet-smelling camphor, sandalwood paste or CHANDAN, musk, also known as KASTURI, and Ganges water.

My father used to say that this particular well has underground connections with sacred mother Ganges River, as does Sweta Ganga Tank as well.

Out of deepest respect for this holy water, the sevakas who traditionally carry the pots tie a cloth around their mouths and over their heads. While the pots are carried, there should be no talking, and no spitting or sweat should fall into them. On the SNANA BEDI, the pots are purified a second time also. After the bath is complete, devotees rush to drink a little drop of this holy water, called PADUKA.

In the evening of SNANA PURNIMA, the deities are dressed in a special dress, known as HATI VESHA, or Elephant Dress. Afterwards, the deities are said to suffer from "cold" for fifteen days. This period is called ANASARA, and there is no darshan in the temple.

On an Ekadasi day two or three days before RATH YATRA, the deities' faces are totally repainted. Only the worshippers in charge of painting are allowed inside the temple at this time. Known as KHADI LAGI, the Putting of Color, this special ritual is done to wooden Jagannaths in homes and monasteries on this day also.

The greatest festival of Puri occurs at the end of June or in the first week of July, that is, the great Car Festival, RATH YATRA. On the day before the Chariot Festival, darshan is given for the first time in fifteen days. It is called NABA JAUBANA DARSHAN. NABA means "new," and JAUBANA means "youth."

Once every 12 or 16 years, according to planetary configuration, totally new wooden images are made. This is called NABAKALEBAR YATRA, or "new body." It is one of the biggest festivals in all of India, second only to the big KUMBHA MELA, held in Prayag once every twelve years.

Not only is RATH YATRA the biggest festival in Orissa, it is also the most costly. Every year it costs a minimum of \$50,000. From ancient times, car festivals have been held to take deities outside the temple for all to see, Hindus and non-Hindus alike. Some historians say that RATH YATRA was part of the marriage rites for Lord Jagannath. Now it is celebrated simply as a summer outing for the deities. The three huge chariots are made anew every year.

In the palm leaf script, NILADRI MAHODAY, it is stated that if one has the chance to pull the ropes of the chariots, he will attain liberation, or MOKSHA, in this lifetime.

"RATHE TU BAMANO DRUSTWA,  
PURNAJANAMANA VIDYATE."

"One who pulls the chariot  
And sees Lord Jagannath seated therein,  
Knows no more births."



*On Rath Yatra day local lads dance in devadasi style in front of Lord Jagannath as he comes to His chariot.*

In times of great religious strife in India, RATH YATRA remains an especially unique celebration, for it celebrates the unity of man, beyond caste and creed. All may participate, Hindu and non-Hindu alike, reflecting the true nature of God's love for all. The chariots reach the small Gundicha Temple at the other end of Grand Road by the second day.

In olden days, worshippers left their homes and remained with the chariots until they returned to the main temple nine days later. As the gopis felt like this towards Sri Krishna, so do the sevakas. They used to eat only the fruits and coconuts thrown to the chariots and slept under the wheels at night.

So far as I can remember, I have never missed a RATH YATRA in my lifetime. Although I

travel outside Orissa often, I must be here on this day. I take special pleasure when I have the chance to perform the Khuntia seva of calling Lord Jagannath to come out of the temple in PAHANDI.

Beating two canes together over my head, and calling "KALIA!, KALIA!" (Oh, black-faced Lord!), I stand in front of Him among the huge crowd of sevakas and lead Him out. I feel as if He is looking only at me, staring at me with His big round eyes, and coming according to "my order." As the Lord has said in many slokas, "Whenever My devotee calls, I will come!" The hairs on my arms stand on end, so thrilling this experience is to me!

As to how I became a radio and T.V. commentator for RATH YATRA, I can only say that it was











all His will. Once as a very young man, I was passing by the radio station in Cuttack. A thought flashed through my mind. "I am the peon of God in His great office (a temple sevaka), so let me try to relay Car Festival. Jagannath will help me!"

Somehow by the Lord's grace, I was able to meet the radio station director that very day. When I expressed my desire to him, he looked very surprised and said that a selection committee made such decisions. I knew many important persons even lobbied for this chance; still I persisted, saying, "Let me try!"

So he sent me to a busy crossroads of Cuttack with an assistant and a tape recorder. I was to relay the traffic events there. I was very nervous but at least I had a little gift of imaginary story telling. All the events I narrated were totally made up, but when the director heard the tape, he was pleased and hired me on the spot! Such was the Lord's will!

On the ninth day after RATH YATRA, the deities return to the main temple. This return Car Festival is called BAHUDA, and the same rituals are repeated. The next night the deities are dressed in full gold decoration, while seated on the chariots. The golden decoration used in this SUNA VESHA costs crores of rupees, making Jagannath Temple one of the wealthiest temples of India.

Only the gold CHITTA, or Third Eye of Jagannath, is not taken out. This golden ornament contains a huge diamond surrounded by eight precious gems, symbolizing God's divine consciousness, His awareness of all, His omniscience.

Outside the temple only a gold JARI CHITTA is used. When the original CHITTA is again placed inside the temple, a special puja is done, called CHITTA LAGI AMABASYA. AMABASYA means no moon day and the festival falls on this day.

In the mathas and ashrams of Puri, the biggest celebration of the year is JHULANA, the Festival of Swings, in the beginning of the rainy

season in August. For seven days murtis of Radha and Krishna are put on gorgeously-decorated swings.

In the temple SOLA and JARI art work of Orissa include all animals, deer, rabbits, birds, peacocks, dancing gopis, Yashoda Ma, foster mother of Sri Krishna, and devas. The elaborate swing of EMAR MATH is decorated in real silver and gold, not in paper JARI. Devotional songs, especially the singing of GEETA GOVINDA, PALA and GOTIPUA dance programs are held.

The August birthday of Balabhadra, the elder brother of Jagannath, is celebrated in every home of Orissa in the sweetest way. It is called RAKSHI PURNIMA. RAKSHI means "to save."

On this day, brothers, even as young as three or four, honor their sisters by giving them a little gift, perhaps just a 10 paisa coin. The little sister then ties a JARI flower decoration on her brother's wrist.

It is hoped that this sweet bond of affection between them, called RAKSHI BANDANA, will continue throughout life. Even aged brothers, in their eighties, visit their sisters' home on this day! If the father or sister's husband dies, it is the duty of the brother to look after her.

On RAKSHI PURNIMA my father's sister used to come to our house and tie a RAKSHI flower on his wrist. I can still remember them sitting and talking, and laughing together, my father about 80 and his sister about 75!

As Balabhadra is felt to be a reincarnation of Balaram, Sri Krishna's elder brother, who was a cowherd boy, cows are worshipped on this day also. They are given holiday from work. Their horns and hooves are painted; and they are treated to a special cake made only for them!

Throughout India, the birthday of Lord Krishna is celebrated in the holiest way. In Jagannath Temple special rituals are held; the part of BHAGAVATA describing the birth of Krishna must be recited, and the actual puja at the time of the birth of a child is done.



*Preceding Pages: People climb the main gate of Jagannath Temple and sit here in trees to witness RATH YATRA Festival of Puri.*

*Above: On the ninth night after RATH YATRA, Lord Jagannath is dressed in Golden Decoration outside the temple for all to see. This is called SUNA VESHA.*

The brass image of MADAN MOHAN is given bath; an umbilical cord made of chappati flour is cut with a silver knife; honey is applied to the "wound"; and the name of KRISHNA is given. Afterwards, the "baby" is given a sweet milk drink, called PANCHAMRITHA, made of milk, sugar, honey, curd, and ghee. The next day he is put in a small swing for all to come and see.

Every year on this night of Sri Krishna's birth, it must rain! It is said that Vasudeva, the father of Krishna, took the baby from the prison to the village of Nanda that very night to save him from

certain death. It was raining heavily and he carried the baby in a basket on his head across a raging river. To commemorate this event, members of wrestling centers go to take bath in a river on the west side of town, known as the "Jamuna River" of Puri. Like Sri Vasudeva carried his divine son, they often lift their little sons on their shoulders and carry them also. When I was five or six years old, my father did once too. Thus, the actual events of Sri Krishna's birth are relived on KRISHNA JANMASTAMI DAY.

At the end of August or in the first week of





*On RAKSHI PURNIMA a sister ties a paper flower bracelet on her little brother's wrist. The string is known as RAKSHI and symbolizes their bond of affection.*

the ocean itself. Of these, Sweta Ganga has perhaps the most ethereal atmosphere. Death rituals are performed here daily. Just a half block off of a busy temple road full of shopkeepers, pilgrims, and pan sellers, it is like entering another world, so peaceful and otherworldly it is.

Although DASARA FESTIVAL is celebrated all over India in the beginning of October, it has special connections with divine mother Bimala in Jagannath Temple of Puri. After the last rites of PAHUDA are finished, and all the sevakas have gone home, the worshippers of mother Bimala Temple inside the courtyard of Jagannath Temple begin a special secret puja, called GUPTA PUJA. It lasts for 16 days, and MAHASAPTASATI CHANDI is recited, recording the divine activities and glories of mother Durga.

The Brahmins who do this puja must observe strict physical purity for sixteen days. When they read this ancient hymn, they cannot stop in the middle and must pronounce all slokas correctly. The reading takes three hours, and is done after mother Bimala has been offered special BHOGA, including fish curries. This is the only time non-vegetable food is cooked inside temple grounds, but it is not cooked in the temple kitchen.

For 16 days the dresses of mother Bimala are changed, although some of these VESHAS have been discontinued in recent years. Traditionally, She is dressed according to the different aspects of the divine Mother that She projects on those days. The complete list is as follows:

1. **BANA DURGA** - Mother Bimala is dressed as

a wild forest Durga, with hair loose and flying. The full TRINITY is there. As all-pervading life force, or SHAKTI, she stands with one leg lifted. Lord Vishnu is kneeling, removing a thorn from her foot. Both Lord Shiva and Lord Brahma (in the shape of a dog) are witnessing this. It shows that mother force is the greatest power in the universe.

2. **JAYA DURGA** - As all-victorious, she stands with her foot on the demon Mahishasura, killing him with her trident.

3. **BHUBANESWARI** - As most beautiful mother, she is shown with four hands, each carrying a weapon, that is, SANKHA, or conch, CHAKRA, or spinning discus, PADMA, or lotus, and GADA, or club. The demon Mahishasura is praying in front of her. (This VESHA is not done today.)

4. **RAJARAJESWARI** - As queen of all, mother Bimala is shown with two hands, one holding a pot of nectar and the other, a japamala for meditation. As the most compassionate aspect of Mother, she meditates for the good of all.

5. **MATANGI** - As loving mother, she stands with "arms" outstretched, like Lord Jagannath, to embrace all. Lord Jagannath is shown in SOLA by her side. This VESHA suggests the unity and harmony that she brings to the world.

6. **UGRATARA** - As peaceful mother, she is worshipped to give peace of mind, especially when one is very angry or frustrated. She has arms and legs made of SOLA, showing her in a state of meditation, in padmasana posture.

7. **SINGHABAHINI** - As the lion is a symbol of Hinduism, she represents the divine victory that man achieves by surrendering his animal instincts to her. As divine charioteer of humanity, this is the most divine mother vasha.

8. **BAGALA** - One of the ten mothers of DASA MAHA VIDYA, whose wisdom bestows enlightenment, she is shown with two hands, one in blessing with palm down, and the other in ABHAYA, "DO NOT FEAR" mudra, that is, palm up. As the

mother who blesses, she uplifts all. (This vasha is not done today.)

9. **NARAYANI** - Seated on the eagle Garuda, the vehicle of Lord Vishnu, she is seen as four-handed mother Lakshmi, wife of Lord Vishnu. As such, she represents the inseparable unity between husband and wife, Lord and nature. She is mother in her most faithful aspect.

10. **DASABHUJA DURGA** - As the most powerful Durga, she is shown with ten hands, and holding ten weapons, killing the demon Mahishasura.

11. **HARACHANDI** - Shown sitting cross-legged in front of a SOLA image of Lord Vishnu, and praying with folded hands, she represents mother in her most devotional aspect.

12. **DHUMABATI** - She is a Tantric goddess. If one worships her, he will have the power to change his body size or location. One with her SIDDHI may become very small or be in two places at once. She is four-handed, each hand holding a lotus. DHUMABATI is the mother who bestows spiritual powers. (This VESHA is not done today)

13. **SODASI** - As the goddess of youth, her age is about sixteen. She has two hands, one in ABHAYA and the other in blessing. Her full figure is covered with gold and silver ornaments, such as ear rings, nose rings of NATHA and GUNA, ALAKA on the forehead, finger rings, necklaces, waist chains and many anklets on her feet.

14. **KAMALA** - In mother Lakshmi form, she is seated on a lotus. Her two hands are in ABHAYA and blessing. She is the mother who maintains and protects, as she is the wife of Lord Vishnu. Her other name is NARAYANI.

15. **BALABHAIRABI** - As a feminine aspect of Lord Shiva, she rids man of the six evil qualities, that is, KAMA, or lust, KRODHA, or anger, LOVA, or greed, MOHA, or ego, MADA, or pride, and MARCHHAJYA, or jealousy and narrow-mindedness. She is four-handed. In two hands she lifts a snake over her head, representing







victory over these six sins. In another hand she holds a pot of AMRITHA, or nectar of immortality, and in the fourth hand ABHAYA mudra. (This vesha is not done today.)

16. **VEERABHADRA** - Four-handed, she represents the divine mother in all. In one hand she holds a parrot, which is a symbol of JIVA, or soul. In another hand, she holds a japamala for meditation. In the third hand she shows ABHAYA MUDRA and in the fourth hand she blesses all. In Indian poetry it is said that there are two birds in man. One is his body which eats, and the other is his soul, which does not eat and is caged inside the body wishing for release. (This vesha is not done today.)

Women are not allowed to come near mother Bimala on these days, as it is felt that her power may be projected in them and they would be overcome. They can have darshan from a distance and also visit the neighborhood Durgas, especially mother Kakudi Khai, on the southern side of Lion's Gate.

Like all the clay statues, she is an image of Durga killing the demon, Mahishasura. But she is felt to have mother Bimala's spiritual powers. According to one story, she actually ate a cucumber from the hand of a small boy who innocently said, "If you are actually my mother, you will take this cucumber from me." Unlike Ganesh Puja, if one begins Durga Puja in one's house, or a Durga murti in one's neighborhood temple, it must be continued every year. Otherwise, something inauspicious will happen.

Although the number of street Durgas, or

Gosanis, is small in comparison to Calcutta celebrations, their power is still very great, largely because this tradition has been carried on for centuries in exactly the same way. Even the neighborhood images must be made in the same pose every year.

The Gosanis are worshipped for the last three days of DASARA, preceding the 10th day, which is called VIJAYA DASAMI DAY. These three days constitute the DURGA PUJA celebrations in Puri.

Twice daily, puja is done and CHANDI is read in all of these places, once at about 10 a.m. and again after 10 p.m. at night. The day after VIJAYA DASAMI DAY, all are carried in procession to Lion's Gate of the temple, where they take darshan of the Lord and then are immersed in a nearby river. Such a great spiritual power prevails for this period that when they are no more, a huge vacuum is felt in Puri. The main Durga mothers of Puri are as follows:

1. **BARABATI DURGA** - Nagamath Lane, Manikarnika Sahi. Almost two storeys high, she is the biggest mother and is said to be the President of the Gosanis. She leads the procession and is lifted with great difficulty by young men of Barabati Jagaghara. Electric lines must be cut when she comes, for fear she will hit them.
2. **GELABAI DURGA** - Manikarnika Sahi. GELABAI means "most affectionate mother." This mother murti was once the family deity of our house, but as the cost became too great for one family to maintain her, the whole SAHI took over the puja.
3. **BANA DURGA** - Manikarnika Sahi. This is the wild mother Durga of the forest, whose hair is loose and flying.
4. **CHAKRAKOTA DURGA** - Harachandi Sahi. This Durga is named after the small Durga Temple there.
5. **MAHANTESWARI DURGA** - Manikarnika Sahi. This is a Durga supported by a private

*Opposite: Grand Road of Puri is lined with mother DURGAS, called GOSANIS, during DURGA PUJA in Puri.*



family.

6. **KANAPURIA DURGA** - Lokanath Road. This is also a family Durga.

7. **BHOGAJAGA DURGA** - Dolamandap Sahi. This Durga belongs to BHOGAJAGA wrestling center.

8. **JAHNI KHAI** - Dolamandap Sahi. The second largest Durga, she is said to have taken this JAHNI vegetable from a small child and eaten it.

9. **SUNYA GOSANI** - Bali Sahi. SUNYA means "mother of the cosmos, the whole creation."

10. **SAHI DURGA** - Bali Sahi. SAHI means "street," and she is the traditional mother of this neighborhood.

11. **HAJURI GOSANI** - Manikarnika Sahi. This is the family Durga deity of the Hajuri Chakhi Khuntia family.

12. **KAKUDI KHAI** - beside Lion's Gate. She ate a cucumber from a small boy, a KAKUDI, and is felt to manifest mother Bimala's spiritual power outside the temple.

On VIJAYA DASAMI DAY, the 10th day of DASARA, great celebrations are held all over India. On this day Lord Rama is said to have killed Ravana and become victorious in Sri Lanka. All real victory comes from spiritual power, or the divine mother SHAKTI, in man. This is the inner meaning of VIJAYA, or victory.

Inside Jagannath Temple, the three deities are dressed in small golden decoration, like kings, as Lord Rama regained his kingdom on this day.

Celebrating the birthday of Kartikeya, the younger son of Lord Shiva, KUMAR PURNIMA also falls in October. Lord Shiva had two sons, Kartikeya and the elephant-headed Ganesh. Kartikeya was the more handsome, and a symbol of youth. The moon is worshipped by unmarried boys and girls throughout this night, as it symbolizes eternal youth. New clothes are traditionally given to all members of the family on this day.

One of the most popular and unique festivals of Orissa is PRATHAMASTAMI. The eldest child

of the family is honored, especially the eldest son. He is given new clothes, and made to sit on a wooden puja seat, called PIDHA. In front of him a clay pot full of water is placed on a mound of rice paddy. The mother then wishes him a long life by praying to mother Sasthi Debi, the goddess who protects children.

The deep significance is that the first-born ultimately takes on the burdens of the family after the death of the father. The family traditions must be maintained by them. A familiar sloka tells,

"JYESTA BHRATA SAMA PITRU."

"The oldest son is the father himself."

PRATHAMA means "first." As I was the second son, I could not understand why no one did puja to me. My mother was very kind and allowed me to sit also. She said, "I will do puja to both!"

In olden days, poisonous snakes were a great danger, as Puri was a jungle area. Even today, cobras can be seen occasionally in the wild. So on one day a year, called GARBANA SANKRANTI, snakes are worshipped. Tantric worshippers go into the forest and catch a poisonous snake. They bring it to Puri in a basket and do puja to it, giving it fresh milk to drink. They carry it from house to house so the inhabitants can have darshan. People believe if they have darshan of a poisonous snake on this day, they will not be bitten by one throughout the coming year.

In PANJI, the yearly almanac of Orissa, the dates of four great festival nights are always listed. The first is AHO RATRI, or MAHA-SHIVARATRI night in February. AHO means "to be awake." For spiritual seekers this is the most auspicious night for meditation. It is said that Parvati had a vision of Lord Shiva on this night.

The second great night is MOHA RATRI, or the night of Krishna's birth in the month of August. He was born inside a prison. It is said that



*On PRATHAMASTAMI DAY, a small boy stands on a puja board, called PIDHA, as arati is done to him as the first-born child.*

the jailors were put under a spell of Maya, or illusion, and slept so that Krishna could be taken out by his father Vasudeva to a safe place. MOHA means "happy," and this is a night of great celebration, because Sri Krishna is considered to be the PURNA AVATAR, the full Avatar, in whom all the powers of God were manifested.

The third night is DARUNA RATRI in October. It is also called MAHASTAMI, the second night of DURGA PUJA. DARUNA means "very difficult." Durga is said to have killed the demon, Mahishasura on this night, something too difficult for a lady to do!

The fourth great night occurs at the end of October, KALA RATRI, the night when mother Kali manifested herself on earth. KALA actually

means "time," and mother KALI is felt to be the controller of time, especially the time span of life and death in all creation. She is the angry DURGA, with tongue hanging out and a garland of skulls around her neck.

On this night, tantric worshippers of the Mother, meditate in cremation grounds after midnight. It is believed that mother KALI Herself is roaming the streets at that hour. Consequently, people are afraid to go out after dark. In Puri special pujas are done to SHYAMAKALI, the black mother goddess in Bali Sahi. A few clay images are made by individual families on their outside verandahs. These are traditional SHYAMAKALIS. Unlike GANESH and mother DURGA images, no new KALIS can be made by



other persons. Puja, however, is the same as that for mother DURGA.

As brothers honored their sisters on RAKSHI PURNIMA in August, sisters now invite their brothers to their homes and give them a rice meal, sweets, and new clothes. This festival in October is called BHATRU DUTIYA. BHATRU means "brother."

Through such customs, close family ties are developed. I never saw my father go to any house. He only knew the temple and his home, and in his early years up to the age of sixty or so, the local jagaghara. But on BHATRU DUTIYA, he went to his sister's home!

All over India the "Festival of Lights," known as DIVALI, is celebrated with firecrackers, big parades, and tiny lights in all the windows of the houses. To welcome Lord Rama back to his kingdom of Ayodhya after his defeat of Ravana, the people lit tiny lamps, called DIPAS, in their windows.

On this day in Puri, people also burn bundles of sticks, called KAURIA, in front of their houses. The head of the family waves the flaming sticks in the air to call the ancient sages. It is said that the caves of the Himalayas become too cold at this time of year, so the sages come down to the valleys. The flaming KAURIAS light their way and welcome them.

However, in Puri people celebrate two DIPAVALI days! This first DIPAVALI is celebrated in houses and the temple, but the second DIPAVALI is meant only for God. Occurring a few weeks later, it is called DEVA DIPAVALI. It is to greet Lord Jagannath Himself, as people think Puri to be the modern-day Ayodhya, and Lord Jagannath, Sri Rama Himself.

The whole of Jagannath Temple is covered with small lamps, up to 5,000 dipas! In my father's time there were no floodlights lighting up the temple at night. Only on this one night did the dipa lamps light up the temple against the dark blue sky.

The whole month of November, also known as

Kartik, is considered to be the holiest month of the year in Puri. Thousands of widow ladies come from different parts of Orissa, especially Ganjam District in the south, to do KARTIK BRATA. BRATA means "vow or promise," and all married ladies observe at least eight BRATAS a year.

However, in this month, widow ladies do puja at the ocean in Puri every morning before dawn. It is called RADHA DAMODHAR PUJA. They get up at 4 a.m., take bath in the ocean, and do puja to a coconut symbolizing Sri Krishna.

DAMODHAR refers to Radha's beloved Lord and master. As widows, they pray to get a good husband in their coming birth, as Radha got a vision of Sri Krishna.

In the past not only widows, but also the men of Puri used to go to many spiritual places inside the town. Today, they go mainly to five temples, those being,

1. **Chakra Nrisingha Temple** - Chakratirtha Road.
2. **Sweta Ganga Tank**
3. **Markanda Tank**
4. **Narendra Tank**
5. **The ocean itself**

They fast all day, not even taking water. At each place, they take bath and light dipa lamps. At night, they take only MAHAPRASAD. This one-day festival is called SHREEKSHETRA PARIKRAMA, or Rounding of the Holy Places of Puri.

The month-long puja of widow ladies coming to Puri culminates on the full moon day of the month of Kartik, known as RASA PURNIMA. RASA means "dance." All day long bhajan parties circle Jagannath Temple, singing devotional songs of Radha and Krishna. The evening before,

*Opposite: In Kartik month widows do RADHA DAMODHAR PUJA on Sea Beach of Puri. Making Shiva Lingas in the sand, they pray for a good husband in the coming birth.*







## EIGHTEEN TYPES OF BATH-TAKING IN PURI

1. **MAGHA SNANA** - in January. As this marks the beginning of the New Year, people take bath for purification at this time.
2. **CHANDRABHAGA SNANA** - at the beginning of February. For health and well-being of family members, people go to Chandrabhaga River near Konark Temple by the thousands. They stay overnight and do sun puja and take bath at dawn.
3. **PAPANASINI ALAVYA SNANA** - in March. If one has committed any sin and is in mental agony, he takes bath in the ocean at this time to be purified.
4. **BARUNI SNANA** - in April. If one prays to have a wish granted, he takes bath in the ocean at this time.
5. **AKSAYA TRUTIYA SNANA** - in April. Ladies take bath in the ocean and then give special BHOGA to mother Lakshmi and distribute sweets to neighborhood children.
6. **BAISAKHA PURNIMA SNANA** - in May. Shortly before SNANA PURNIMA time in the temple, home deities are given bath from a pot of ocean water to which is added chandan, kasturi, and the sweetest-smelling flowers.
7. **PUNYAPRADA GANGA DASARA SNANA** - in May. To be rid of a sin committed, one does this SNANA.
8. **MAHATI SNANA** - in July. MAHATI means "great." If one wants to develop the greater virtues in oneself, that is, the spiritual qualities, he takes bath on this day.
9. **VIJAYA SAPTAMI SNANA** - in October. In memory of Lord Rama, people take bath in the ocean, dress their house Jagannath in a royal manner and go to help with the immersion of mother Durgas in a local river.
10. **AMABASYA SNANA** - in November. At Divali time men go to the ocean in the afternoon and take a dip. When they return to their homes at dusk, they light the bundle of sticks, called KAURIA, to call the rishis from the Himalayas.
11. **PANCHATIRTHA SNANA** - in November. Men and groups of women take bath in all the five holy tanks of Puri on SHREEKSHETRA PARIKRAMA day. This is the biggest day of the year for taking bath. In olden days people went by foot to all the holy tanks. My own father used to rise at 3 a.m. even at advanced age and go walking to all the tanks before dawn. Because he said his sons were lazy, he carried with him a puja pot. At all the tanks he filled it with a little water. When he returned, he sprinkled this holy water over the bodies of his sleeping sons!
12. **KARTIKA AND RAS PURNIMA SNANAS** - in November. As this is the most spiritual month of the year, people of Puri take bath at least once this month in one of the five holy tanks of Puri.
13. **SAGARA SNANA** - in winter months. When the weather of Puri is slightly cold, people often get up at dawn and walk to the ocean or one of the other holy tanks of Puri and take bath. It is felt this is stimulating to both the body and soul.
14. **MANASIK SNANA** - any day. When a wish is fulfilled, for example, the birth of a child, people take bath in one of Puri's holy tanks.
15. **SUDHI SNANA** - any day. When the eldest son carries the dead body of his parent, he takes full bath in the ocean by the cremation ground. Collecting a little ocean water, he cooks a "last meal" for the deceased parent in completely wet cloth. Then he goes to Sweta Ganga Tank and again takes bath there. After the body is burned, the other relatives do also.
16. **GANGA SNANA** - once in a lifetime. As Ganges water is necessary for all important family pujas, people journey to the Ganges often and collect Ganges water in bottles. My mother used to sprinkle a little Ganges water over her head any time she was touched accidentally by a man other than her husband.
17. **TRIBENI SNANA** - once in a lifetime. Puri people travel to Prayag in Uttar Pradesh to take bath at the place where the three holy rivers of India meet, that is, Ganga, Jamuna, and Saraswati.
18. **GAYA SNANA** - once in a lifetime. The eldest son of the family goes there and does SRADDHA to the forefathers. After this bath in the Ganges there, he never needs to do SRADDHA to them again, so powerful is puja and bath-taking in this holy place.



*A young man emerges from sea bath as widow ladies take small boats to float on the ocean. These boats symbolize man's journey across the vast ocean of life.*



the finest singers of Orissa gather to sing before the people at the main gate of the temple. Thousands stand to hear the divine music which lasts until about 3 a.m. Then the widows go to the ocean to take bath and do a last puja.

When I was a young boy, I remember going to a cinema and returning late at night during this time of year. It was after midnight, and in the darkened street I could hear the washing of utensils, bath-taking from the local tap, and soft talking of ladies. It had to be Kartik month! All these old ladies had been sleeping on the street verandahs and were now getting up at 12:30 a.m. to begin their daily puja at the ocean.

To culminate this most holy month of Kartik, special gorgeous veshas are given to the deities inside Jagannath Temple throughout the week of full moon, or RASA PURNIMA. They are as follows:

1. **RAI DAMODHAR VESHA** - RAI refers to Radha, and DAMODHAR is Sri Krishna, the one with the beautiful body. Subhadra is Radha's representative, and many dancing gopis made of SOLA and JARI are in front of her. In BHAGAVATA, it is recorded that Sri Krishna gave a vision to each of the gopis in RAS LILA dance during this autumn time.

RAS means "dance," especially the circular folk dance of north India common even today in the villages. LILA means "play or sport," and refers to the divine activities of God on earth.

What is unique to Puri in connection with this VESHA is a miracle of Lord Jagannath. After observing this "LILA," one king of Puri started this VESHA. A priest of the temple, one Taluchha Mahapatra, had a lady friend. When he took a used flower GUNA of Lord Jagannath to the king, the king found a long black hair in it. He became furious.

The sevaka, in desperation, had Lord Jagannath decorated with fake hair the next day. The king came, and thinking it to be fake, tried to pull it off. But the murti of Lord Jagannath began "to bleed" from that spot.

The king immediately forgave the worshipper and said that the love of this man and woman must be very pure to attract the mercy of Lord Jagannath. So the king made RAI DAMODHAR VESHA, celebrating the divine love of Radha and Krishna.

2. **LAKSHMI-NARAYAN VESHA** - The next night the deities are dressed in royal garb, as Sri Vishnu and Lakshmi. This vesha was started by philosopher- saint Adishankar to satisfy the wishes of many devotees of Lord Vishnu in Puri. Subhadra has hands and legs, made of SOLA, and sits like a real queen on this day.

3. **BAMANA VESHA** - On the third night, Lord Jagannath is dressed as Bamana Avatar. It is said that He met King Bali and took DANA of three steps on this day. DANA means "presentation," and King Bali was renowned for his generosity in giving gifts. But he was too proud.

So when Bamana, the dwarf Brahmin Avatar, took three steps, His steps covered the whole earth, sky, and King Bali's head itself. Thus his pride was vanquished. What is amazing in this vesha is that Lord Jagannath looks smaller, dwarf-like.

4. **TRIVIKRAMA VESHA** - This vesha was started by the PANCHAKSA, or five friends, the five great literary giants of the 16th century. The main writer was Jagannath Das, the author of the Oriya version of BHAGAVATA. VIKRAMA means "sphere." Lord Jagannath is master of the three spheres of the universe, heaven, earth, and the underworld. He is given heroic dress, with sword, conch, spinning chakra, and club.

5. **LAKSHMI - NRISINGHA VESHA** - On the day before RASA PURNIMA, Lord Jagannath is dressed as half man, half lion, to celebrate His first human incarnation, as Nrisingha, in Satya Yuga.

6. **RAJA VESHA** - On the day of RASA PURNIMA itself, the deities are again dressed in royal dress, with golden ornaments. But now Lord Jagannath becomes Sri Krishna Himself, with golden flute.



*On GARBANA SANKRANTI, poisonous cobras are worshipped. The puja pot carried on another worshipper's head represents mother Parvati and inside the pot is the herbal remedy for snake bite. If a cobra is seen on this day, Puri people believe that no other poisonous snake will visit their homes for the rest of the year!*

On one of the inside walls of the Jagamohan dancing hall of the temple, there is a unique sculpture. It gives further meaning to "RASA LILA" in Puri. A chariot is built out of the gopis' own bodies; they are supporting it in various exquisite poses. On top of the chariot sits Sri Krishna Himself. This sculpture is called GOPI RATH.

For the whole month of Kartik, the temple town of Puri is inundated with widow ladies and the sounds of puja. If one goes outside at 4 a.m., the lanes will already be crowded.

For thirty days these ladies take no house-

cooked food, only MAHAPRASAD from the temple once a day. For the last five days, called PANCHUKA, most married ladies stop eating one favorite food. On the last day, known as CHHADAKHAI, all these women cook huge feasts and again take their favorite food.

During the winter, Puri becomes slightly cold and blankets are necessary. It is felt that the deities are also "cold," so they are covered with cotton blankets. For one month, beginning in December, only their eyes and mouth can be seen. This is called GHODALAGI VESHA, or PRABARANA SASTI.





*As the winter season is cold, the deities of Jagannath Temple are covered with warm cloth called GHODALAGI. This custom is observed in homes and mathas as well.*

As the body is cold and needs more food for energy during winter, Lord Jagannath takes an extra meal also. It is called PAHILI BHOGA and is given at dawn. Temple seva is very difficult for this one month because all the morning rituals, such as bath-taking and dressing of the deities, must be done before dawn.

Boys in the wrestling centers also take this PAHILI BHOGA after exercise in winter. In the temple it consists of PAHANTI KHECHEDI, that is, rice with ghee, salt, and muga dal, fried vegetables, and a special milk sweet called KHEERI, made of milk, fine ground rice, raisins, and sugar. It is said that mother Yashoda feeds this meal to Lord Jagannath. All the other food of the day is

felt to be prepared by His "wife," Lakshmi.

Thus, although the festivals of Puri are vast in number, they all have the temple of Lord Jagannath as their focus and their final goal.

The inner significance of RATH YATRA is often felt to be the ultimate journey of man, from body consciousness to divine consciousness, and from limited love to universal compassion for all.

The chariot of Lord Jagannath is said to be man's own body. The white horses are his senses. When God, or Lord Jagannath, as the divine charioteer, is seated inside one's heart, man's journey in this life will be fruitful, and as the name of His chariot NANDI GHOSHA implies, he will experience "endless bliss."

## CALENDAR OF THE MAJOR FESTIVALS OF PURI

### JANUARY

1. SHAMBADASAMI - Sun Worship
2. PUSYA ABISEKA - Installation Ceremony of Lord Jagannath
3. MAKARA SANKRANTI - New Year of Rice Harvest
4. SARASWATI PUJA - Worship of Saraswati, mother of Wisdom and Learning
5. GURU PANCHAMI - Special Puja on Thursdays to Lakshmi, mother of Wealth
6. MAGHA SAPTAMEE - Dawn Bath-taking in Chandrabhaga River near Konark

### FEBRUARY

7. AGNI UTCHHABA - Fire Worship
8. MAHASHIVARATRI - Worship of Lord Shiva all night

### MARCH

9. HOLI - (Phagu Dasami and Dola Purnima) - Spring Festival of Throwing Colors

### APRIL

10. RAMA NABAMI and SAHI YATRA, Sri Rama's Birthday and Street Festival
11. MAHAVIRA JANMA - Hanuman's Birthday

### MAY

12. RUKMINI'S MARRIAGE
13. AKSAYA TRUTIYA and CHANDAN YATRA - Taking the deities for a boat ride in Narendra Tank for 21 days
14. NRISINGHA JANMA - Birthday of Nrisingha, the half-man half-lion Avatar

### JUNE

15. SEETALA SASTI - Shiva's Marriage to Parvati
16. RAJA SANKRANTI - Planting Festival of mother Earth
17. SNANA PURNIMA - Bath-taking of the Deities before Rath Yatra
18. KHADI LAGI EKADASI - Painting of the Deities before Rath Yatra

### JULY

19. NABA JAUBANA DARSHANA - First Darshan after Painting of the Deities
20. RATH YATRA - Annual Festival of Chariots lasting about 9 days
21. BAHUDA and SUNA VESHA - Return Car Festival and Golden Decoration
22. CHITTA LAGI AMABASYA - Replacing of the Golden Chitta (Third Eye)

### AUGUST

23. JHULANA - Festival of Swings
24. RAKSHI PURNIMA, BALABHADRA JANMA, and COW WORSHIP DAY - Day on which brothers honor their sisters
25. KRISHNA JANMASTAMI - Sri Krishna's Birthday
26. GANESH CHATURTHI - Birthday of Ganesh, the elephant-headed son of Lord Shiva.

### SEPTEMBER

27. RISHI PANCHAMI - Five days during which ancient sages are honored
28. RADHA ASHTAMI - Birthday of Sri Radha
29. BAMANA JANMA - Birthday of Bamana, the Dwarf Avatar
30. MAHALAYA SRADDHA - Fifteen day ceremony honoring forefathers

### OCTOBER

31. DURGA PUJA and VIJAYA DASAMI DAY - Three day Festival to mother Durga
32. KUMAR PURNIMA - Birthday of Kartika, the second son of Lord Shiva
33. PRATHAMASTAMI - Day on which the oldest child, especially the oldest son, is honored.
34. GARBANA SANKRANTI - Snake Worship
35. SHYAMAKALI PUJA - Mother Kali Puja
36. BHATRU DRUTIYA - Day on which sisters honor brothers

### NOVEMBER

37. DIVALI - Festival of Lights
38. SHREEKSHETRA PARIKRAMA - One day pilgrimage to all holy places of Puri
39. RASA PURNIMA - Celebration of the Rasa Lila Dance of Radha and Krishna
40. CHHADAKHAI - Feast Day after a month-long observance of fasts and puja

### DECEMBER

41. GHODALAGI - Covering the deities with blankets during the winter season
42. PAHILI BHOGA - Special BHOGA offering in the temple for one month at dawn

\* Please note - All of these festivals are based on the lunar calendar and so change slightly in dates from year to year.





## WOMEN OF PURI

It was very late at night, hours after the evening arati was completed. But the memory of my mother's dress, the brilliant red PATA silk, the red ALTA on her feet, and the gold jewelry totally covering her arms and neck, is still vivid in my mind.

She and six other temple ladies, who were also richly dressed, were quietly arranging dipa lamps, new cloth, fruit, garlands, and MAHAPRASAD cakes, called PITHA, on a new rice KULA, a straw basket for cleaning rice. Their faces were half covered with the end of their saris.

It all seemed so mysterious to a six year old boy. I tried to go and hug my mother, but she would not allow it. Only she said, "I am in puja now; I cannot touch you." As they all went out the door, I started to cry. I could not bear being separated from my mother. An elderly uncle picked me up on his shoulder and secretly we followed the seven ladies.

It was nearly midnight and in those days there was no electricity. Only the moonlight and one lady carrying a big clay dipa lit the way. My mother was leading the single file procession of ladies with the basket of offerings in her arms.

My uncle whispered in my ear, "They are going to the seven Mothers. They will invite them to your elder brother's holy thread ceremony tomorrow."

Suddenly the seven ladies stopped before our local goddess temple. I remember my mother waving an arati lamp\* and the ladies all making HULA-HULI sound.\* From that day onwards, I

\* Arati lamps are lamps made of clay or brass and lit with camphor at the end of puja.

\* HULA-HULI is a sound made by moving the tongue very quickly from side to side and at a very high pitch. Ladies of Orissa make this sound at puja time and for all auspicious occasions.

*Opposite: On the day of her marriage, the beauty of a lady of Puri is measured not in her wealth of jewelry, but in her LAJYA, or reserve.*





*To sanctify a marriage, husband and wife hold hands and repeat marriage vows over a coconut representing Lord Jagannath.*

knew that puja must be something very special.

Not until much later in life did I come to understand a little of the deep significance of this event. The seven mothers are like the seven ancient rishis who must be invited before any spiritual ceremony can be performed.

So seven women of the family must go to seven mother temples the night before the function and invite them to come. Their presence blesses and sanctifies the event.

All mother temples are various aspects of the divine Mother Durga. One sloka from MAHASAPTACHANDI tells,

"SARVA MANGALA MANGALAY,  
SHIVE SHIVARTA SADIKE,  
(Mother Parvati)  
NAMASTE STRAIMBAKE GAURI,  
(Mother Gauri)

NARAYANI NAMASTUTE!"

(Mother Lakshmi)

"In all auspicious works,  
May You come and help us,  
We want You to bless us  
In every deed we do."

In divine Mother, the women of Puri take shelter. In turn, she projects Herself in them, sustains them, and ultimately absorbs them also.

In the past, little girls were addressed with names of the Mother. Up to age seven, she was called UMA, or "Ooh, Ma!" Mothers worried about the little one that she may fall or be in some danger, so they often called her in this way.

From ten to fifteen, a girl was called GAURI, as this was mother Parvati's name before marriage. From fifteen to twenty, she was addressed as RAMYA, "one who is liked by all." After mar-

riage, she was called PARVATI Herself.

The first puja a little girl learns is called BALI PUJA, and it culminates in a special ceremony unique to Puri, called NETA, during the first days of Durga Puja in October.

NETA comes from the Sanskrit word NRUTYA, meaning "to dance." In olden days, the most highly respected lady of Puri was the temple DEVADASI, who never married and only danced before the Lord in the temple. She was considered the earthly wife of Lord Jagannath Himself.

Little girls as young as three and four are taught by their grandmothers the Oriya song to Lord Shiva, or MAHABALI, one of His 26 names, meaning Lord of Great Strength. This BALI PUJA lasts for about 21 days before the final NETA ceremony.

The girls continue the puja until puberty every year. At this time they worship Lord Shiva like mother Parvati Herself did, praying for a good husband in the future.

On the last three days of NETA, they dress like her, or a temple DEVADASI, and go to Markanda Tank to complete the puja. It is said that Lord Shiva grants all prayers in this holy place. The final lines of the little song say,

"Let our married life be good,  
Let us not quarrel,  
If we do not quarrel in the future,  
We will give good food to You,  
Lord Shiva."

It then says that those who don't worship Lord Shiva first will be in distress and have bad husbands. So the little girls must worship Him with purity and sincerity. Lastly, the song concludes with the prayer,

"Let us be granted the opportunity to serve our husbands well."

Even today daughters of Puri are married soon

after puberty, usually between the ages of 16 and 20. An Oriya saying says, "Ghee kept too many days soon spoils!"

Most marriages are still arranged by the parents, and dowry, unfortunately, is usually demanded. A young girl's household training then continues under her mother-in-law. All of her responsibility now lies in taking care of her husband's family.

At the time of marriage, she takes only one vow. I remember my own daughter's marriage day. As her husband-to-be entered our house on the day of the marriage, she sprinkled raw rice on his head, her own head and face fully covered. At that time she silently repeated this sloka,

"OM DURGE DEVI JAGADHATRI,  
PATIME BASAMANAY,  
SATABARSE NIYA JAYU,  
SHUVAGAMA SADAM KURU."

"Oh Mother Durga,  
Bless me with Your divine presence,  
So that I may be liked by my husband.  
Give us Your strength,  
So that we may live together happily  
For 100 years,  
Let all our activities be auspicious."

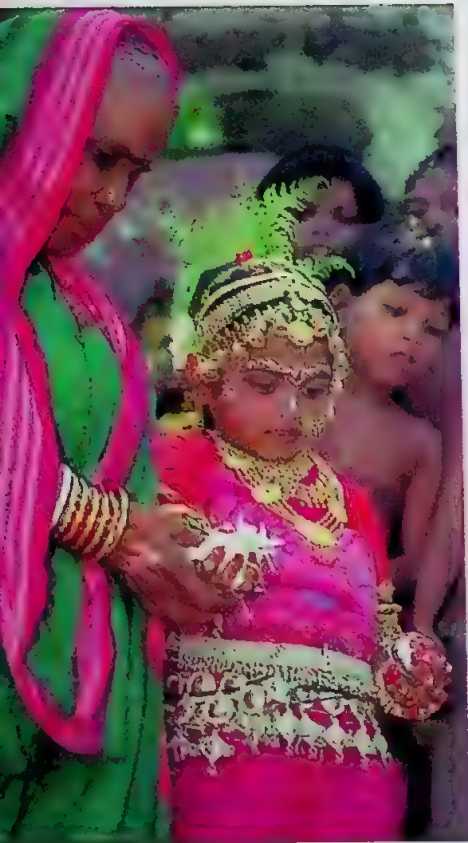
In a well-known Oriya proverb, it is stated:

"JE GHARAJITA, SE JAGATA JITA!"

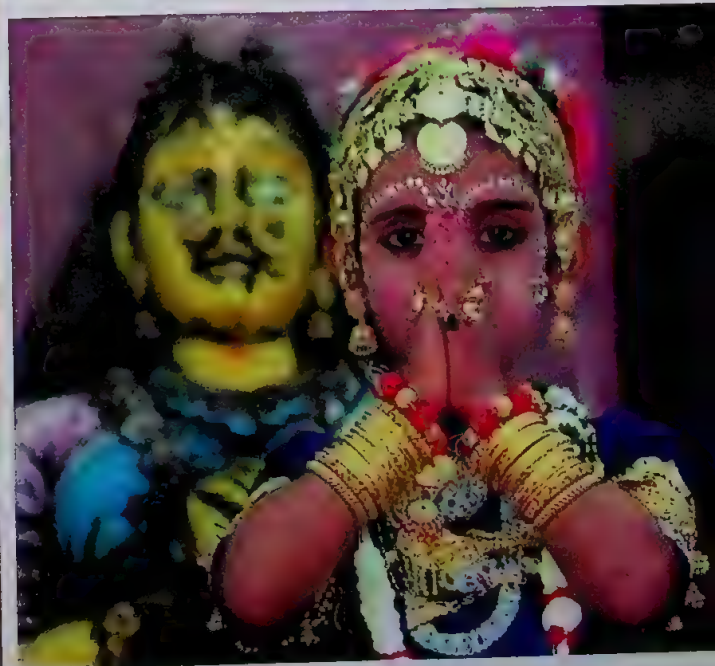
"One who wins in the family,  
Will win everywhere,  
But if defeated here,  
He will face defeat everywhere!"

*Following Pages: At Durga Puja time, little girls of Puri do a unique puja called NETA, in which they pray to Lord Shiva to grant them a good husband in later years. Wearing all the family's best ornaments they look like divine mother Parvati Herself.*











According to Puri traditions, it is the role of women, especially the eldest woman in the communal family, to bring peace and harmony to the home. Another saying tells,

“BHARATARE MARA PRADHANYA BESI,  
BAHAR DESHARE STIRA  
PRADHANYA BESI!”

“Mother rules in India,  
Wife rules in the West!”

The mother is the very life force of the home. If others are absent, daily life may go on as usual. But if the mother is absent, the house is felt to be empty!

So in homes of the worshipper community, the women rarely go out. My own mother never owned a pair of shoes even! She went out only for family ceremonies and darshan in the temple; on neither of these occasions are shoes used.

Home is the temple. As the spiritual force in the home, it is she who leads the husband and children in a godly direction.

On the marriage day in other parts of India, a husband leads his wife around the homa fire. But in Puri, it is the wife who leads the husband. He merely catches hold of the end of her sari and follows. Something of the divine Mother, it is felt, moves and talks through her, nourishing all in the home.

Women of the temple community still observe the tradition of PARADA PRATHA. They are rarely seen by outside guests. Yet there is a saying that what kind of woman she is can be known by the kind of house a wife keeps!

According to BHAGAVAT GEETA, man has been given three divine powers. Like Lord Brahma, the Creator, he has strong will power to act and do good works in the world. Like Lord Vishnu, he has the power to maintain and protect his family. Like Lord Shiva, he also has the wisdom and strength of mind to detach himself

from this limited transitory world.

However, a woman has been bestowed with seven divine powers, those being Humility, Self-control and fear of wrongdoing, Self-sacrifice, Purity and modesty, Patience and tolerance, Faithfulness and faith in God, and Compassion and contentment.

Along with the feeling of reverence and respect, humility might be said to be the greatest characteristic of the Indian way of life. Women of Puri especially are expected to be humble, as in olden days, not independent and proud, or making decisions on their own.

Another Oriya proverb says, “A family is like a bus. The eldest male member is the driver. Often he makes much noise when he starts the engine. But the rest remain silent.” Women are expected to speak little, and then only sweetly and softly.

When there are disagreements in family matters, she should not become quarrelsome, but tell things in such a way that she preserves the balance and harmony of the family. When a husband is angry, a wife should be silent until the next day. We say,

“GOTIA HATARE TALI BAJE NAHI”

“With one hand, you cannot clap!”

I feel that because humility is looked upon as the ideal quality in a lady, divorce is almost unheard of in Puri. Children are taught to be humble before elders, taking padnamaskar of their parents’ feet before taking a trip or any big event in their lives. Above all, husband must honor his wife first. In MANU SANHITA, a famous sloka tells this of women:

“JATRA NARJYASTU PUJYATE,  
RAMYATE TATRA DEVATA.”

“Where woman is worshipped,  
honored, and respected,  
God is present.”



*A young girl trains the family parrot to say the name of God. In Oriya poetry both ladies and birds represent the divine in man.*



Both husbands and wives are trained to think of their duties first, not their rights. This brings about true happiness.

Not only in ancient Purana stories, but also on television, the highest images of moral character are still portrayed, such as Rama and Sita, Harischandra and Saivya, Nala and Damayanti, Radha and Krishna.

Consequently, it is easy to cultivate deep lasting relationships and strong vital families. Ladies read the Puranas daily in their free time and BHAGAVATA is read aloud in a neighbor family's BHAGAVATA house or neighborhood temple every evening.

My father knew Oriya proverbs to quote for every situation. He used to say, "If you tie your mind, you will tie Him! This is not possible if you have no self-control!"

"A good lady," young girls are taught, "never laughs, but ever smiles." Young girls are not to talk with boys, except their brothers, and then only in a soft voice.

But sons also are not encouraged to hang out on street corners with other young men. They are sent to gymnasiums for physical exercise where no ladies are allowed. My father often scolded me, saying, "If you have many friends, you will have many problems!"

Young girls are taught to talk softly and walk slowly. The mother warns, "You may slip," meaning also in one's future life, if there is no discipline. In India the beauty of a lady's walk is compared to that of an elephant, "GAJAGAMANI."

This is not meant humorously. To walk like a horse or deer suggests a restless agitated mind and such a lady is likely to go astray. But if she walks in a slow swaying manner like an elephant, she must be happy and content!

Family needs come first, one's own personal needs last. A mother never eats before the rest of the family is fed, often she eats only the leftovers. Feeding is felt to be more enjoyable than eating.

A small child is fed by hand and often a mother continues feeding her son herself until he is 10 or 12 years old and has his holy thread ceremony.

After this POITA is given, a son is considered a man, and a mother is no longer supposed to touch him, except to touch his feet when he is in sannyasin or puja dress. Actually though, my wife still feeds our youngest son sometimes. His age is 18. Such is the bond between mother and child!

Self-sacrifice is the most important quality for happy family life. We say,

"A son is never defeated in a meeting  
When his father is alive,  
But if the father is defeated in a meeting  
by his son,  
He becomes very glad."

Sisters feed their brothers sweets and tie RAKSHI flower bracelets on their brothers' wrists as a sign of affection and the brothers must always visit their sisters' houses on BHATRU DUTIYA day in November to see to their welfare.

This custom begins at age three or four and continues until death. My eighty year old uncle still visits my seventy eight year old mother on this day.

Purity means PATI PARAMESHWARA. "Husband is God." My wife often tells her grown sons when they complain about the food, "If the king tells it is good, what do I care about the subjects! If you don't like this food, marry soon and tell your wife to make a better dish!"

The height of purity was embodied in the wife of Sri Rama of ancient times. Sita Devi would not touch anything from another man's hand. Even today girls are taught to put money or tea cups, for example, on a table and not directly into the hands of a man.

My own mother was so strict in this regard that after my holy thread ceremony she covered her face even in front of her own son and if I or any other man accidentally touched her, she immedi-



*A young mother feeds her small son by hand. This practice will continue until he is nine or ten and has his holy thread ceremony.*

ately took bath, and sprinkled Ganges water over her head!

A young girl is taught never to exhibit her body. It belongs to her husband only, or her husband-to-be. She should keep not only her arms covered, but after marriage, her head also.

On the actual marriage day, her very face is fully covered. In olden days a husband first saw his bride's face on the third day after marriage when she was brought to the father-in-law's house! Nowadays, photos are exchanged and a meeting is often arranged, but in this meeting the girl never talks!

Even though Puri is the holy site of the world-famous Car Festival every year and my father was a worshipper in the temple, my mother herself never saw RATH YATRA. Women of the temple community even today are not to go to the market or out in the open for shopping. However, nowadays they do sometimes frequent Puri's small indoor shopping center! If ladies go out, it is always in groups of ladies or accompanied by a brother or son, but never alone.

Women feel that the man they meet as husband is a gift of a previous birth. It is said here, "A chaste lady is satisfied with one man, one room." BHAGAVAT GEETA says,

"JATHA NALASYA DAMAYANTI,  
JATHA RABANASYA MANDODARI,  
JATHA SATYABANASYA SAVITREE,  
PATI PARAMESWAR,  
PATI ISWAR DEVATA."

"Like the inseparable Nala and Damayanti,  
Or Ravana and his faithful Mandodari,  
Like Satyaban and his self-sacrificing  
Savitri,

Like that my husband is to me,  
Like my God he stands before me."

Like this a lady looks upon her husband. A husband is God to his wife. The destiny of the husband is her destiny. The mistakes of the husband are her burdens also. Service to the husband is her greatest happiness. When her





husband is satisfied, her house becomes Heaven.

To maintain one's purity is a woman's greatest spiritual sadhana. LAJYA, or reserve, is the bright red dot of SINDUR on a woman's forehead, and the BRATA thread she wears on her right arm is her most precious ornament. Like her husband's holy thread that he wears on his chest, she is never without it.

The word BRATA means "vow." Before changing one's BRATA, about once every three months, ladies often fast and take bath in holy tanks and visit mother temples. At the auspicious time of MAGHA BRATA in January, it is very cold. But ladies of the temple community rise before dawn and go in groups to take bath in the ocean. Even though they may not know the sloka, they understand its meaning,

"SAGARASNANAKRUTYA  
AHAMPABEETRA BHAVATEE."

"I take bath in the ocean,  
So that I may have a mind  
that will purify all around me."

The eight main BRATA days are:

1. **MAGHA BRATA** - in January
2. **RABI NARAYANA BRATA** - in February
3. **SAVITRI BRATA** - in May
4. **LAKSHMI NARAYANA BRATA** - in August
5. **MANGALA PURNIMA BRATA** - in August
6. **SOMANATH BRATA** - in September
7. **GURU PANCHAMI BRATA** - in November
8. **SUDASA BRATA** - in December

Of all the BRATAS, SAVITRI BRATA at the end of May is the biggest BRATA day. All married women observe it. Savitri was one of the most

*Opposite: A young boy goes to the temple for darshan of Lord Jagannath after receiving his holy thread, marking his entrance into manhood. His mother peers out the door proudly as he leaves.*

pious ladies in Indian cultural history. She is even today famous for her faithfulness and self-sacrifice for her husband, Satyaban. Even though she was warned that her husband would have a premature death, she remained steadfast, saying, "If my love for him is pure enough, no death can come to him."

When Satyaban did die, she carried him herself, unafraid, to Yama, the Lord of death. The Lord himself came to take the husband's soul, but he became so pleased with Savitri's devotion to her husband that he granted Satyaban renewed life.

In memory of this, women of the temple community of Puri worship mother Savitri on this day, with much care and sanctity. Her picture is garlanded, fruits are given, and a little puja is done by every married lady.

Only after the puja is over and the husband's feet are touched in reverence, and Jagannath's MAHAPRASAD is fed to him by hand, does she eat or take water.

The husband then ties a new BRATA thread from the temple on her right arm. The vow in this puja is to serve one's husband better. When elders bless a young married girl, they quote this sloka,

"TO KACHA BAJRA HEU."

"May your bangles never be broken!"

Bangles are glass bracelets given by the husband. If the wife becomes a widow, she never wears them again. Thus, elders are praying that she and her husband have a long happy life together.

All BRATA pujas are promises made to the divine Mother. Even ordinary village ladies strongly identify with the mother force of the universe. On RAJA SANKRANTI DAY in June, it is said that mother Earth is in period. After these three days she becomes fertile and crops are planted.

Women, especially young unmarried girls,



celebrate these three days in a grand manner, swinging on rope swings hung from trees, playing cards, eating fancy sweets and cakes, wearing new dresses, and going to mother temples. They don't do any work, as if they had their period also.

When family problems arise, a mother often says,

"SARBASANHA SABU SAHE,  
AME SAHIBUNI."

"If mother Earth bears all our wicked ways so patiently and silently, can we not tolerate this little thing?"

On this one day of the year, ladies must wear sandals outside, out of respect for mother Earth!

Patience, tolerance, and forbearance are considered to be the qualities of a good mother. One may act angry, but always behind this anger is intense love. This dual feeling is prominent among ladies of Puri, and is called ABHIMANA.

Even in the rituals of the temple itself, it is enacted. When Lord Jagannath is taken out on the RATH to Gundicha Temple, he is accompanied by his elder brother and sister, not his wife, Lakshmi.

Knowing the nature of ladies, the sevakas enact a little drama. A DEVADASI in the past read the lines of mother Lakshmi. She is "angry" because she was not taken along. A wife feels that she should always be with her husband.

When the chariots return, however, she does her duty and goes out to meet her husband in a palanquin and "garlands" him. But then she makes him wait three days outside before the temple doors are opened! The Lord Himself pleads in this dialogue, "If you don't excuse me, who will!"

"Adjust, adjust, adjust!" women are constantly advising their younger sisters and daughters. "God will solve all problems one day or another." Most families in Puri still live in communal houses, so there is much opportunity for adjust-

ment.

One house in Puri today consists of eleven sons and their families! Ladies often eat from the same plate, share towels and saris, and raise the children of the house jointly.

A husband may be bad and the sons unappreciative, but a wife is always a wife. In GEETA, it says,

"KARMANY BA ADHIKARESTU,  
MA PHALESU KADACHAN."

"Surrender all to Me,  
And do not look to the fruits  
of your actions,  
And I will protect you,  
And fulfill all your needs."

Happiness for a woman does not lie in what sort of husband or sons she may be given, but in doing one's duty, one's divine DHARMA. In the deepest sense, an Indian woman is attached, not to a particular husband, but to her duty as a wife and mother.

She honors the position of her husband, even if he drinks and cheats on her. Women of Puri are taught to rely on God for everything. Once after my wife's BRATA puja was complete, I forgot to bring MAHAPRASAD from the temple for her to eat. But when I finally reached home late at night, MAHAPRASAD was there waiting. She only quietly and calmly said, "He remembered."

"Let me find my freedom in 1,000 bonds of Love."

These lines, written by the great Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore, express the feeling of women of Puri. Like this, they find their fulfillment and contentment.

A wise lady is one who knows how to serve well and rely on God for everything. In Puri a lady's greatness is measured in virtues of character, not in intelligence, money, or talents. In fact,



*The bond between mother and daughter is life-long, even though duties are only in the husband's house. Here a daughter takes her aged mother and auntie to see the chariots on Rath Yatra day.*









her greatest quality is her ability to adjust to all situations life gives her.

"NAMRANTI FALIINO BRUKSHA,  
NAMRANTI GUNINO JANA,  
NAMRANTI SUKULA BADHWO,  
KUTAH NAMRANTI CHETRAH."

"The tree laden with fruit bends down,  
The man who knows much bows his head,  
Likewise, good ladies are always humble,  
Bowing down their heads also."

Except for village ladies carrying pots of water on their heads from the river, women of Puri walk slowly with their heads bent, like a tree laden with many ripe fruits.

The heart full of love is always content. It is like a pot that can never be broken, no matter how many holes are made in it. Such is the type of self-assurance cultivated among the ladies of Puri even today.

*Opposite: Modern and traditional styles mix in Puri. A mother and daughter prepare to visit goddess temples on the night before a family ceremony. It remains for the little girls of Puri to decide which path they will take in the future.*





## BIRTH AND AGING

"KARARABINDEN PADARBINDAM,  
MUKHARABINDE BINIBESHYANTAM,  
BATSYA PATRASYA PUTE SAYANAM,  
BALAM MUKUNDAM SIRASA NAMAMI."

"I pray to BALA MUKUNDA  
the divine child who bestows happiness on all,  
I pray to this BATA KRISHNA.  
When the whole world was flooded,  
He was born.  
He is the supreme being,  
Whose face and hands have the attraction  
of the lotus.  
I pray to BATA KRISHNA to save me."

A sloka from BHAGAVATA, telling of the  
childhood pastimes of Sri Krishna.

This exquisite PATTa painting of BATA  
KRISHNA depicts the birth of the cowherd Lord  
in His divine essence. When a child is born, he  
sucks his fingers and toes, as it is said that  
nectar is stored there to serve as food even when  
mother's milk is absent.

In SISU SANHITA it is stated that a baby  
enters MAYA, or the illusion of the world, at the  
moment of birth. But before birth he was residing  
with God in VAIKUNTHA, or Heaven. There he  
was pure, good, innocent, and his appearance  
was very bright. It is believed by people of Puri  
that if a baby sucks his foot and not his fingers, it  
is a sign that he is a divine child. Such a child is  
egoless and fully surrendered to God from birth.

Any newborn baby is said to be BALA  
KRISHNA, or BATA KRISHNA, and he will make  
all around him happy. Those who come to see  
him tell this sloka,

*Opposite: Depicting baby Krishna sucking divine nectar  
from his toe, this painting is done in modern PATTa  
CHITRA style.*





"JAGANNATHASYA PUJA BIDHI KURBANTU,  
JAGANNATHASYA BHAKTA BHABANTU."

"Let him know all rituals of Lord Jagannath,  
And let the baby be His Bhakta (devotee)."

So much love and importance is shown to the image of BATA KRISHNA or the child KRISHNA that the book telling of His pastimes, the BHAGAVATA, is read or recited at all important occasions of a person's life, such as at the hour of birth and the hour of death and every evening in homes, monasteries, and in all the temples of Puri.

Perhaps the greatest difference between the culture of India, which the temple town of Puri so beautifully reflects, and the culture of the West is the great SAMMANA, or respect, given to all aspects of life and all stages of life as well. The first lesson a child is taught, while still a baby being carried in his mother's arms, is to fold his hands in NAMASKAR, whenever he meets elders.

NAMASKAR is the form of respectful greeting in India, meaning "I bow to the God within you." It is used throughout life to show respect to all elders and teachers. Jokingly, old people of Orissa say,

"AKA SALAM NUHEY,  
SAHE SALAM KARIBA."

*Opposite: As families are mostly communal in Puri, the very old and very young spend much time together.*

*Here a grandson copies his grandfather's NAMASKAR, a grandmother teaches BALI PUJA, and an old man takes a walk with his grandchildren. As families always travel together, a baby is carried on his father's vegetable scales to Puri.*

"If you don't give one NAMASKAR today,  
You will be compelled to give me  
100 NAMASKARS one day!"

In Orissa respect is shown everywhere and for all sorts of things, such as the teacher's chair, the father's umbrella, the school books and holy books which must never touch the floor, and the kitchen SEELA used for grinding. Respect is built into the Oriya language even. When addressing elders, one uses a respectful verb form only and speaks in a soft respectful tone.

In olden days a child took PADNAMASKAR of his parents every morning, that is, he knelt and touched their feet. At age two or three, the mother helped by gently pushing his head to the floor. Even now when parents or children leave or return from journeys, PADNAMASKAR is always taken. Respectfully, a wife takes PADNAMASKAR of her husband and eats his leftover food as blessed "PRASAD."

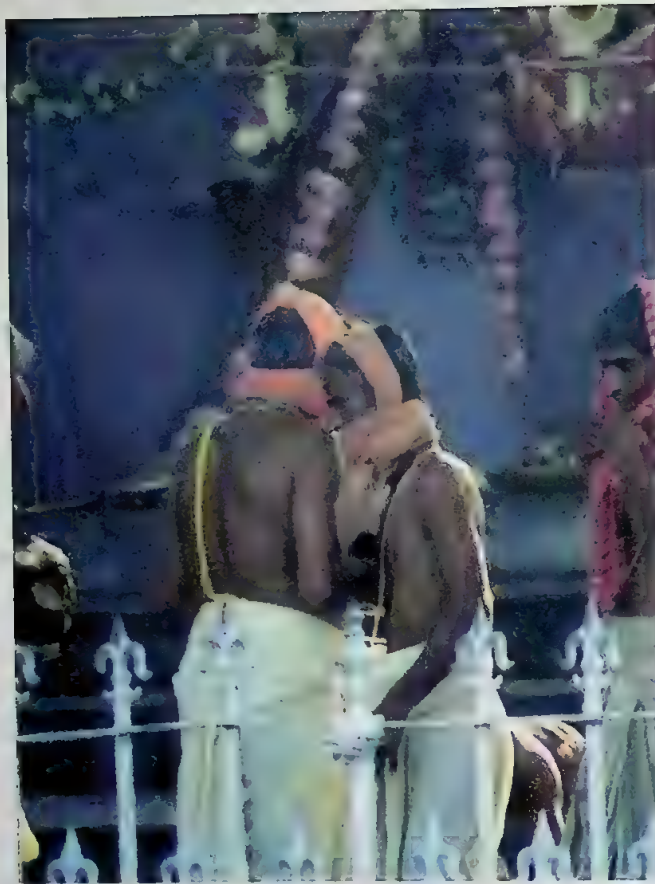
The MAHAPRASAD of Jagannath Temple is so respected that one carries pots of MAHAPRASAD only with shoes off, walking barefoot whatever the distance. It may only be eaten on a banana leaf on the floor and not mixed with any other foods.

Whatever is touched by MAHAPRASAD becomes MAHAPRASAD, so one must be careful not to touch one's dress to the leaf. One should never walk on even a grain of MAHAPRASAD, so all the floor must be cleaned carefully after eating. Out of deep respect, hands and mouth are washed before and after eating it.

Friends sanctify a deep friendship by eating MAHAPRASAD together on the same banana leaf. MAHAPRASAD is also called ABADHA. This is the name of the clay pot that MAHAPRASAD is cooked in. The cooked rice is offered in this very pot. The derivative meaning of ABADHA is "that which cannot be separated." Out of respect for this life-long friendship, the two friends then address each other as their ABADHA.

It is interesting to observe that a person is paid





*To carry temple BHOGA or pots of holy water to the deities for SNANA PURNIMA, worshippers tie their mouths with cloth out of deepest respect.*

respect, due to his position in the family, or temple, or community, even if his conduct is not good. Mother-in-law is always mother-in-law; father is always father; elder brother is always elder brother. In a meeting the oldest man is always voted President, even if he can't hear well or see. Jokingly, we say he is made President, but not Treasurer!

Only inside Jagannath Temple is no respectful NAMASKAR given, not even to the head priest. Why? This is because we feel that in the temple there is only Jagannath for us. He has no intermediaries, and we have no kin.

Unlike elders in the West, who may or may not be treated with token respect, elders in India, and in Puri in particular, are treated with homage. By dint of their age, they are felt to know more, having seen many "storms."

"NUA GACHHA CHHAI DIE,  
PURUNA GACHHA PHALA."

"A young tree gives shade,  
An old tree gives fruit."

Never is an old person forced into a nursing home. Until their death, elders are the heads of the home and have final authority in all decision-making. An elder is necessary to perform all the spiritual ceremonies in the family. An Oriya saying tells,

"JAHA GHARE NAHI BUDHI,  
TAHA GHARE JAI BUDHI."

"The house where there is no old lady present, is ruined."

It is felt that an old mother has compassion on all members of the communal family and brings peace and harmony to the home. Her face may be deeply wrinkled and her smile toothless, but she must be present in every family photo. If she

is not included, people say that it is like looking at only the leaves, and not the root of the tree!

The deepest SAMMANA, or in this case Reverence, is shown for life itself. Life is a gift from God; it belongs to Him. Abortion, except where the mother's life is endangered, is totally unheard of in Puri

When a lost soul commits suicide, a murder case can be brought against the dead body! When the poor fellow tries to commit suicide and fails, he can be tried in court!

Outside persons often become frustrated because they say that Indians have no sense of time. A new shirt may be ordered, but it is no use pressuring the tailor. That is just like trying to make a lotus bloom in the rainy season! All will happen at the right time.

"PAIBAKU THILE PAIBA,  
DEBAKU THILE DEBA."

"What one is due to get will be given. If not due, nobody can give."

True, local people often use this saying as an excuse for laziness, but underneath lies a deep respect for the rhythms of nature. With the opposite meaning, people also say,

"CHAKE GALE BARA HATA."

"In one turn, the wheel of time travels twelve feet!"

The meaning is that time doesn't wait for anyone, so one must not waste time.

According to SANNYAS DARPAN, a person's life is divided into four stages:

1. **BALYA ASHRAMA** - Childhood years from ages 1 to 10.
2. **BRAHMACHARI ASHRAMA** - Student years from ages 10 to 25.
3. **GRIHASTA ASHRAMA** - Householder years

from ages 25 to 60.

4. **SANNYAS ASHRAMA** - Spiritual life from age 60 onwards.

These are the natural cycles of a man's life, divinely-ordained, according to his body rhythms. If man follows these ASHRAMA guideposts, he can enjoy all phases of his journey through life and have time for everything as well.

Life is not promised. As people say in the West, anyone bored isn't paying enough attention. One must respect one's DHARMA, or duties, in that particular stage of life he is in.

To try to mix student years and married life only dissipates energy. To long for married life in the senior years is to miss the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for spiritual life free from temporary worldly concerns. One should be fond of all the phases of life, humorously put like this,

"Children play with toys,  
Youths play with ladies,  
Old people play with God."

If one fails to seize the moment, after childhood and youth, we laugh and say that such a man has gotten his long life from three animals,

1. From the ox - the working years from 20 - 40.
2. From the donkey - the years of many burdens in family life from 40 - 60.
3. From the owl - the years of old age from 60 onwards, when he can't do anything but sit and watch all coming and going.

Actually, life is directed towards the Spirit in all the four stages. In BALYA stage, the child mainly depends upon his parents for teaching spiritual lessons, respect and discipline. The traditional schools of Puri, called CHATASALIS, teach stories from PURANAS and spiritual slokas as well.

In olden days young boys were sent to gurus in the forest to study. These GURUKULA ashram





*Respect is shown to Lord Jagannath from even outside the temple. Undistracted by the worldly street noise around him, a youth removes his shoes and raises his arms in prayer at SINGHA DWAR gate.*



*Devotees reach out to take the blessings of Lord Jagannath's arati lamp.*





*In homes of Puri the grandfather does NAMA PUJA and gives the baby his name, after consulting the child's horoscope.*

schools taught more than spiritual texts. They taught control of senses and service to the guru. There were no distractions, no T.V., no cinema houses, or ladies.

The word BRAHMACHARI means "celibate." Young men lived there for ten to twelve years. As BRAHMA, or life force, stayed in their foreheads, they developed great memory power and will power. If the senses were controlled in youth, the boy's future would be bright. Nowadays, students study only for big salary, not service. But before, we felt that if only mother, father, and teacher were satisfied, one would have a happy life.

If a young man controlled his senses in his student days, he would become a good husband and father. Only after serving the guru with

complete devotion, could he serve his wife and children.

Only after a boy finishes his studies, does he marry. This is true even today. Also it is out of respect that the eldest son must be married first and then the younger ones, all in order of birth. In the student years one gains knowledge, hopefully some spiritual knowledge. The end of this knowledge, or wisdom, is character.

Spiritual training is put to the test in the GRIHASTA years. DHARMA, or righteous living, must be translated into action. In Puri the most respected elder is not the most successful businessman or the one with many titles after his name or the most famous singer. The wisest and most respected is he who has known himself, the

one who has "tasted" God.

So it is that after the age of sixty people in Puri retire from the worldly arena, often by going on pilgrimage to all the holy places of India. On return they devote themselves to more spiritual pursuits. The eldest son takes charge of the day to day family routine. He is respected as the father himself,

"JYESTHA BHRATA SAMA PITRU."

"The eldest son is the father himself."

Important ceremonies mark these different role changes throughout life. All the "rites of passage" are celebrated in Puri with great joy and reverence. Invitations are sent to Lord Jagannath first and the occasion is always concluded with a grand feast of MAHAPRASAD for all.

### 1. BIRTH RITUALS

Just before and after the birth of a baby, the father sits in meditation, reciting this sloka,

"SARVA MANGALA JAGANNATHA  
DURGAMADHAVA."

"Let all be auspicious,  
May Lord Jagannath and mother Durga  
bless this child."

In puja dress in the puja room, he often recites BHAGAVATA at this time.

### 2. SURJYA PUJA

On the 7th day after birth, the baby is exposed to the sun for the first time. First he is given bath in yellow tumeric water. Placed on his mother's lap on an outside verandah, he feels the heat of the sun's rays for the first time. A Brahmin priest recites two lines from SURJYA mantra,

"JABA KUSUMA SANKASAMA,  
KASYAPEYAN MAHADYUTI."

For one year the baby is not taken outside again. This is both for his physical and spiritual protection.

### 3. RAKSHA KABACHA PUJA

On the 21st day after birth, the mother of the baby whispers in the child's ear the name of divine mother BIMALA twenty-one times.

"BIMALA RAKSHAKARA."

"Mother Bimala, save me!"

Fruits are offered to Her also, as she is the main mother deity in Jagannath Temple. While Lakshmi is the wife of the Lord, she is His SHAKTI, or energy. After BHOGA goes to Lord Jagannath, it is offered to her. Only then does it become MAHAPRASAD.

### 4. SASTHI PUJA

It is believed that mother Sasthi writes the destiny on the forehead of a child. Puja is done to her and special PITHA cakes made of bedi flour are offered to Her and then distributed to family and friends. For a son, this puja is done on the 21st day. For a daughter it is done on the 30th day.

### 5. MANGALA PUJA

In the sixth month after birth, seven married ladies sit in a circle, keeping the baby in the center. They do puja to the baby, as a newborn baby comes straight from God. Offering fruits and waving lamps, they recite MANGALA ASTAKA.

"JIBEMA SARADA SATAM,  
PASYEMA SARADA SATAM,  
MADHU BATA RUTAYATE."

"Let him live long,  
Let his future be good,  
Let his life be filled with nectar!"



## 6. NAMAKARANA PUJA

**Naming Ceremony.** A baby is called by pet names until his first birthday. Then in a big ceremony he is given a name. The eldest man in the house suggests a name and consults the family priest, or PUROHITA, for possible names based on the child's horoscope.

On the morning of the Naming Ceremony, the baby is given bath in yellow tumeric water that has been scented with cool sandalwood paste. Traditionally, the baby's head was shaven at this time also, but now it is usually done on a later occasion when visiting a holy place. Seven married ladies do ARATI to the baby.

The mother worships these ladies as the seven living mother goddesses who come to bless any auspicious event. She puts red alta on their feet, gives new saris, chandan and a red dot of sindur on their foreheads.

Then the family priest arrives with seven Brahmins. Together they recite VEDAS and BHAGAVATA. The grandfather on the mother's side presents them with new dhotis. In a special sloka the baby's name is told. After a HOMA fire to the gods, the baby's horoscope is read out for the first time, telling his future.

After the puja is complete, the uncle on the mother's side takes the baby to the temple. He must meet and have DARSHAN of Lord Jagannath first; only after this is he shown to friends and neighbors. Lord Jagannath's own chandan is pasted on the baby's forehead and he is blessed by twenty-one Brahmins sitting on MUKTI MANDAPA. Each is then given a coconut.

In the evening SATYANARAYAN PUJA is performed in the house, often accompanied by PALA outside on the street. The six members of the PALA group sit and recite the sacred text to Lord Satyanarayan, who promotes the well-being and prosperity of a child. If a baby is sickly, it is believed that Lord Satyanarayan will restore him to robust health.

## 7. KARNA BEDHA

**Ear-piercing Ceremony.** Between the ages of 3 and 5, both girls and boys often have an ear-piercing ceremony; sometimes their noses are pierced at this time also. With little gold earrings in their ears and new cloth on, they look like a divine child, a baby Radha or Krishna. They are then taken to the temple by the uncle to do NAMASKAR to Lord Jagannath. People plan so far ahead for their sons and daughters, a common saying has come about. People laughingly say,

"MULARU MAIPA NAHI,  
PUAAR ALANKAR ABASYAK."

"There is no wife yet,  
But you are making ornaments for the son!"

## 8. VIDYA ARAMBHA

**Writing the First Word Ceremony.** In olden days a child began his studies at age 6 or 7. He was taken by his parents to the traditional CHATASALI in the neighborhood. The gurudev there first taught him to write the sacred symbol OM on a chalkboard. Nowadays, children may go earlier to school and these schools may be more oriented towards teaching English ABC's.

If so, a Brahmin priest is first called to the house for one or two months. Before teaching the child, he is presented with uncooked rice, ghee, oil, milk, and coconut. Only then is he asked to teach the baby.

First the guru writes the symbol OM and then holding the baby's hand, he traces the letters 21 or 108 times on the floor, saying "OM, OM . . ." as he writes. Again on the floor he draws three big circles in chalk, representing BRAHMA, VISHNU, and MAHESWARA.

Then he recites GURU SLOKA, and the child repeats it after him,

"GURU BRAHMA, GURU VISHNU,



*Both girls and boys may have their ears pierced at about the age of five. Nose piercing is usually done later, if a girl so desires.*

GURU DEVO MAHESHWARA,  
GURU SAKSHAT PARAMBRAHMA,  
TASMAYE SRI GURUVE NAMAHA.”

“I bow at the feet of my GURU,  
Who is the supreme being himself,  
Who is the TRINITY incarnate,  
Brahma, Vishnu, and Maheshwara.”

In this way a child receives his first lesson and his studies are started in an auspicious way.

### 9. NETA PUJA

First Puja of little girls ages 5 to puberty. In the temple community, it is the grandmother who teaches little girls how to do puja. It is believed that one gets a good husband in their future life by doing puja to Lord Shiva, called BALI PUJA, while yet a small child. From ages 5 to puberty, little girls recite this Oriya song to BALI, Lord

Shiva as lord of great strength, for 15 to 21 days every year.

They learn how to do all steps of this puja, from first washing the floor, picking flowers to be offered, offering BHOGA, waving the ARATI lamp, and taking PADNAMASKAR afterwards.

This same puja is done outside the house at holy Markanda Tank, beside a great Shiva Temple of Puri, called MARKANDESWAR, on the last three days. These days coincide with the beginning days of DURGA PUJA in Puri. The little girls are dressed in small silk saris, and decorated with all the family's gold and silver jewelry, sometimes worth thousands of rupees.

They look like mother Parvati herself doing puja and DHYANA to win the heart of Lord Shiva. This early training directs the minds of little girls in a good way. I once watched my five year old granddaughter “playing” BALI PUJA, as little girls in the West play with dolls.



## 10. BRATA CEREMONY

Holy Thread Ceremony, for boys, about age 10-12.

A Brahmin boy is said to have two births, one when he is born and the second when he is given holy thread and officially becomes a Brahmin. Only after this ceremony is he allowed to begin spiritual practices, such as doing puja, japa (recitation of names of God on beads of a tulsi mala), and DHYANA, (meditation).

BRATA means "vow." In the main part of this ceremony, a white sheet is put over the heads of father and son. The father then initiates his son into recitation of the most sacred GAYATRI mantra.

He also teaches the boy the vow of a true Brahmin, who must always show respect for the following six types of persons,

GURU DEVA BHAVA - Treat teacher as God  
PITRU DEVA BHAVA - Treat father as God  
MATRU DEVA BHAVA - Treat mother as God  
ATITHI DEVA BHAVA - Treat guest as God  
MITRA DEVA BHAVA - Treat friends who help you in your life as God  
AHAM DEVA BHAVA - Treat yourself as God

Six holy threads colored with yellow tumeric powder are then put over the boy's left shoulder, representing these six vows of respect. When the father dies, his sons are given three more holy threads, called,

PITRU RUNA - Loan from the father  
MATRU RUNA - Loan from the mother  
DEVA RUNA - Loan from God

These three threads represent the three areas where the sons must show the highest respect. They have been inherited, as "loans," from one's forefathers and God Himself.

They include all the spiritual traditions of the family and mother India as well. To carry on these sacred and very ancient spiritual traditions makes

one a true Brahmin, nothing else.

## 11. RAJASWALA

Ceremony of becoming a young woman, for girls of about 13.

Upon entering puberty, young girls are given a very special ceremony in Puri. Next to marriage this is the most significant day of a young girl's life.

This ceremony marks the end of her childhood play and the beginning of a woman's life. Unfortunately, in the West there is no special celebration to mark this astonishing "rite of passage."

I have marked among my daughters and nieces that they automatically undergo a tremendous change in mental outlook, as well as physical changes at this time.

For seven days after the first day of menstruation, girls are to avoid worldly contacts. They sleep on the floor to keep close contact with mother Earth. They do not go outside and they touch no kitchen utensils. Mostly they take only fruits and water. These days are spent reading spiritual books and stories from the PURANAS.

On the 7th day, a big puja to the mother Earth is performed, called VISWA PUJA. Seven married ladies sit in a circle with the girl and a piece of GUA, or betel nut representing the mother Earth, is placed in the center.

Both the girl and the GUA are worshipped as the divine Mother Herself. As on all auspicious occasions, MAHAPRASAD is distributed to all in the evening.

After this very auspicious ceremony, a girl's role automatically changes. She talks less, even with her brothers, and there is no more joking with them. In Puri girls no longer meet and play with little boys outside.

As the BRATA CEREMONY signals entry into manhood for a boy, RAJASWALA does also for a girl. The mother now teaches her how to sit properly, walk like a lady, cook, and conduct herself with LAJYA, or "modesty, reserve."

This LAJYA is considered one of the most



*After a son receives holy thread, signifying his becoming a full Brahmin, even the mother touches his feet.*

beautiful qualities a lady possesses. As the body is the throne of a lady, this LAJYA is her crown.

## 12. BIBAHA

Marriage Rites - BIBAHA is the word for marriage in Orissa. It means BI, "to be attached," plus BAHA, "to row." In a small boat, husband and wife must row together. If one is rowing slowly, the other must adjust. If one is rowing in the wrong way, the other must instruct patiently. The little boat is on a journey across the vast ocean of the world with all its dangers. If there is balance in rowing, the couple will reach the shores of Heaven itself!

Thus, the deep meaning of the word for marriage, BIBAHA, is taking responsibility for each other's destiny, spiritual as well as physical. Not only careers, but marriages also are mostly fixed by parents. The girl chosen is usually unknown to

the boy, although in the temple community she must belong to a family in one of the NIJOGS. This is to insure that both husband and wife are aware of temple duties and traditions and able to carry them out in the home as well as the temple.

Traditions are more important than the marriage itself. People marry to have a son to carry on these sacred obligations. In olden days girls were selected on the basis of their spiritual qualities and qualifications. Unfortunately, in present day Kali Yuga, the dowry system has too much taken over; whichever father offers the biggest dowry, his daughter is chosen!

Marriages are big grand affairs not only in Puri, but all over India. Guests often number in the thousands, even in poor families. All enjoy a huge feast of MAHAPRASAD afterwards. The underlying reason for this is that all the guests become witness to the auspicious event. No





*On the marriage day, a bride leads her new husband around the HOMA fire, as in the future a wife is to lead the husband on a spiritual path. Afterwards they offer flowers into the fire to conclude the marriage.*

marriage papers are ever signed in court. People believe that where there is doubt, there is paper! Thus divorce is almost unheard of in Puri, although some separations do occur and the wife returns to her father's house.

Unless posted in distant cities, sons never leave the family house. The new bride enters a whole new family; her duties are finished in her mother's house. Now she is to help the mother-in-law in her husband's house. For the first few years of marriage she speaks in a very reserved way with her husband and most of her time is spent with the other ladies of the house.

At the time of marriage, three holy threads from the husband's POITA, or holy thread worn over his left shoulder, are given to the wife to wear on her right upper arm. This is her BRATA, and the vow she makes is to be a good wife and mother. These BRATA threads are replaced every three months or so, and the vow is renewed. This shows perhaps how difficult it is to make a marriage work. For BRATAS after marriage, the holy thread is taken from Lord Jagannath's holy thread itself!

It is a strict custom for husband and wife to perform all pujas together and make all spiritual pilgrimages together. But this is told jokingly for other occasions as well,

"MUNDA NATHAI GANDI!"

"If the head is not invited,  
How can the trunk go?"

The meaning is that husband and wife are like one body. If the husband is not going to a function, how can his wife go?

Elders give much encouraging advice in matters of conjugal quarrels. They are fond of saying,

"AKA THENGAKU,  
SAHASRA HANDI."

"A thousand pots can be destroyed by one stick!"

The meaning is that it is easy to break a relationship, but difficult to remake. They also say,

"KATHA MAJILE MOTA,  
SUTA MAJILE SARU."

"Treat another's bad habits like a little thread,  
As it is sharpened with use, it disappears."

Too much talk about the other's bad habits and weaknesses makes them bigger. Instead they should be treated like a little thread which disappears in time.

When husband or wife is angry, the other should be silent, or as elders put it,

"GALI DEBA LOKA BADA NUHAY,  
GALI SAHIBA LOKA BADA."

"The one who scolds is not great, But the one who listens without any reaction."

It is not that one does not make any response eventually, usually the next day, but that one does not react with anger.

About anger, elders also ask, "What kind of anger do you have?" and then quote the following sloka,

"PATHARARE GARA,  
BALIRE GARA,  
PANIRE GARA"

"Like a line on stone, (permanent)  
Like a line in sand, (temporary)  
Like a line in water (momentary)."

As advice to younger men, elders often say,

"JANAKU SANTUSTA NAKALE,  
ANYAMANANKU KIPARI SANTUSTA KARIBA."



"If a man cannot be satisfied with one lady,  
he can never be happy with many!"

To grandchildren, elders in the family remind  
them of the sacrifices parents have made for  
them,

"TANKA THILE  
MA BAPA CHHADA  
SABU MILE."

"If one has money,  
he can buy anything,  
except a mother and father."

In family disputes all discuss together, but the  
eldest man or grandmother make the final deci-  
sion. They are felt to have equal compassion for  
all. The mind divides, but the heart unites!

"HRUDAYARE SAMASTE BASANTI,  
MANA BHITARE SAMASTE CHHIDA HUANTI."

"The heart is such a place where everyone is  
seated, But in the mind all must stand!"

### 13. UPASANA - Fasts during GRIHASTA years.

During the GRIHASTA stage of life, one of the  
most common spiritual practices is that of fasting.  
UPASA means "to go without food." Many per-  
sons of Puri observe this UPAS weekly. Some  
avoid spicy foods, onion, and outside hotel food  
on their UPAS day. Others make a full fast, with  
no water or food until evening, and then eating  
only MAHAPRASAD.

I know one very old man of Puri who observes  
UPAS on all days of the week except one! Some  
ladies observe UPAS on a certain day of the  
week because there is a difficulty in their  
husband's horoscope concerning that planet's  
house.

Others do so on Tuesdays to worship mother  
Bimala, or Thursdays to worship mother Lakshmi,  
or Mondays to pray to Lord Shiva to make them a

better wife. During UPAS, they go to the temple  
for that day.

On Sankranti days once a month, many  
houses perform a HOMA fire ceremony to ward  
off any difficulties on the next day which is con-  
sidered inauspicious due to planetary alignments.

On Ekadasi days twice a month, my father  
used to fast the whole twenty-four hours, not  
touching water even. As these days are felt to be  
most auspicious for spiritual activity, he spent his  
time in puja, DHYANA, and reading scriptures.  
Only the next day, after feeding one Brahmin, did  
he touch food. This strict habit he maintained at  
least throughout the last thirty years of his life.

### 14. SRADDHA CEREMONIES - Death Rituals for parents and forefathers.

The Sanskrit word SRADDHA means "affec-  
tion, devotion." Out of deep affection, one per-  
forms death rites for loved ones for thirteen days.  
On the anniversary dates of their passing, par-  
ents are remembered with a one-day SRADDHA  
ceremony also.

On these days, the eldest son changes his  
POITA, or holy thread, and does the SRADDHA  
PUJA. We believe that the father or mother  
actually comes, takes food, and blesses us. Not  
only the deceased parent is addressed, but all  
the past seven generations on both the father  
and mother's side. If a name is not known, one  
says simply, "JAGANNATH, JAGANNATH."

However, my own father was very strict and  
taught me all the names. He used to say, "If you  
cannot do my SRADDHA, I will be hurt and not  
rest in peace. By names we come, so you must  
address us all!" One is not called a true son  
unless he does SRADDHA for his mother and  
father. After the anniversary SRADDHA, 7, 21, or  
108 Brahmins are fed, depending on one's  
capacity.

My father used to say, "You can't give me  
anything. My head is already towards the grave.  
(SWARGA DWAR). I have thrown away such





*During the fifteen days of MAHALAYA, people of Puri go to SWETA GANGA TANK to pay homage to their ancestors. All final death ceremonies are also performed here.*

good food that you can never get. I've had everything in life so don't give me dhoti dress or fancy food. I have given you so much also, but with only one hope, that is, when I lay dying, I will hear BHAGAVATA being read from your lips. Don't take a loan for my thirteen days (funeral expenses). Make do with what I have left; only read BHAGAVATA. This is my one wish."

Every year on my father's SRADDHA day, he somehow shows his presence, his "nearness." If I forget that the next day is his SRADDHA, I will meet someone who looks like him or reminds me of him!

Often on his "day," his Spirit comes over me. My father and I were very different. Whereas I spend money freely, (he would say, "like ocean water!"), my father was very tight-fisted. On his "day," without thinking I become like him.

Also when some fine ghee rice is ordered from the temple for his MAHAPRASAD that day, only

coarse rice will come. That was his liking! Such is the connection between generations in Puri.

In September every year people of Puri pay homage to all their distant forefathers. This ceremony is called MAHALAYA. One goes on this day and sometimes daily for the next fifteen days to SWETA GANGA TANK at early dawn. Men doing this puja during this period let their beards grow out, and their nails as well, so they are easy to spot in Puri. They perform the SRADDHA there as they would for any funeral ceremony.

Actually SWETA GANGA is the place where the first SRADDHA is observed on the 13th day after any death. Many spirits live there and have been actually seen.

This deep respect for even distant forefathers and traditions of the distant past shows what great unity of thought is maintained down through the ages in Puri. Life styles, modes of dress and transportation may change, but not the content





*An old man of Puri and two sadhus pay respect to Lord Jagannath on His chariot.*

of people's thought. These ancient traditions remain very much alive. Progress is made by the younger generations, not in rebelling against the past, but in upholding its goodness.

"UPAKRUTA HEBA  
HRUDAYARA PRATIKA."

"Gratitude is the memory of the heart."

Not only relatives but the family gods and goddesses in the puja room which are made of brass or wood are given yearly birth ceremonies.

Death ceremonies are observed for Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra, and mother Subhadra not only in the temple, but also in the home. This change of form of the deities occurs every 12 to 16 years and is called NABAKALEBAR YATRA.

Puja rooms are whitewashed before the installation of the new deities. In homes of Daitapati worshippers, the whole house is white-washed, as one does when a family member dies.

Lord Jagannath in the temple also "performs" SRADDHA to His "fathers." A special puja is done by the Pujapanda priest to Vasudeva, the father of Sri Krishna, and Dasaratha, the father of Sri Rama, as Lord Jagannath is seen as the embodiment of both Rama and Krishna.

## 15. RITES OF SANNYAS

Age 60 onwards - In India people traditionally do not celebrate their own birthdays, but only those of gods and goddesses. As children they may distribute sweets and go to the temple, but that is all. Birthdays are days of giving thanks for this human birth, not days of "getting." Birthday

presents are a totally western concept now sometimes practiced in big cities of India. By simply being born nothing is due, but much is expected.

The only birthday in India that is marked with great celebration is the 60th birthday! In South India some men have a second marriage performed, or more precisely, a spiritual remarriage. Husband and wife were bonded together physically in their youth. Now they are again bonded, but this time purely spiritually. The ceremony is performed by a priest. In Puri no such custom exists, but the year is still marked as the great turning point in a person's life.

Practically speaking, it also marks the year of retirement from government service in Orissa! A man's life totally changes after this. The world becomes a big zero; spiritual pursuits are his one and only quest.

All the four stages of a person's life are called "ASHRAMAS." Ashrams are holy places where people go to learn of spiritual things. In SANNYAS ASHRAMA, people including even kings and queens often left their families and careers and retired to secluded ashrams.

The word SANNYAS means SAT, or "truth," and NYAS, "with," that is, one in this last stage of life should live with truth. Whether or not people go to ashrams in this phase of their lives or not, their minds should now dwell on permanent eternal things, not the illusory day to day pursuits and petty worldly desires that will soon leave them.

Husband and wife often make pilgrimages to all the holy places of India in these years. A common saying is this,

"TANKA SARE, HRUDAYA PUREE!"

"Purse emptied, heart filled."

It is considered the test of a good son if he is able to maintain his parents in their senior years. But these so-called "Golden Years" are only

golden if one takes advantage of them, or as the saying tells,

"BAYASA SADHU KARE NAHI,  
EHA BUDHA KARE!"

"Years do not make sages,  
They only make old men!"

In GRIHASTA years, one often had only part-time detachment. He did "office" DHYANA, or meditation, and had "chappals" DARSHAN. His mind was half the time fixed on office duties while sitting in the puja room in the morning, and when going to the temple at night, he thought only of his shoes in the rain outside!

To leave behind worldly pursuits and desires and lead a spiritual life devoted to God is the goal of one's whole life, according to Indian thought. It is man's natural state, but one has to want it.

Even attachments to family should fall off. One must finish this game called life. As an Oriya saying tells,

"RUNA SESA, BYADHI SESA, SATRU SESA."

"Finish off debts,  
Finish off worries,  
Finish off enemies.  
(By turning them into friends!)"

Elders of Puri even today lead simple lives. "Simple living, high thinking" is an apt phrase to describe their life style in these later years. My own father knew only two places in his last twenty years, the temple and the puja room. When young people are too extravagant, elders say,

"JOTA MULYABANA HELE,  
BI PADA TALE!"

"Even a pair of shoes  
Decorated with diamonds  
Can only be worn on the feet!"







In the month of November, many widow ladies of Puri and from all over Orissa come for a month-long puja. Every day they go to the ocean before sunrise and perform RADHA DAMODHAR PUJA. They follow very strict discipline and eat only MAHAPRASAD. Some do this puja to get a good husband in their next birth. Some do it to get God while yet in this body.

Another name for God is PREMASWARUPA, Love Incarnate. This love, according to elders of Puri, cannot be bought in the marketplace.

"PREMA NIRABATARE,  
ALODANARE NUHAY."

"Love comes in silence,  
Not in crowds."

When a beloved husband dies, the widow only wears white saris and never decorates herself with jewelry again. When young daughters-in-law in the house tease her and ask where she sleeps, she replies, "You all sleep in the Raja rooms, but I sleep in the puja room!" The deity who is in the puja room is Raja to me!"

Only the widow knows this true love. In the real spiritual sense, her husband is still very close to her, as a poet of Orissa so beautifully put it,

"PATI SARIRA SUKHA PAILE,  
PATNI MANASIKA SUKHA PAE."

"How far is the moon,  
How far the lotus?"

True love has no distance, no separation. It has nothing to do with body. Even if apart, the feeling is that "I am yours, you are mine!"

A PURANIC story tells that when God sent man from VAIKUNTHA, or Heaven, He told man, "You are MANAVA, man, not DANAVA, demon. Think of Me." But man is too busy and finally as he lays dying, man becomes sad and lost.

*Opposite: To complete their month-long RADHA DAMODHAR PUJA elderly ladies dress as Sri Krishna and the gopis of Brindavan and joyously sing and dance.*

God appears again and says, "I gave you all these things to praise Me. I gave you three reminders also. Your 32 good teeth are now gone; your good eyes are gone, your good hearing is gone. Now at least will you not think of Me?"

We believe in Puri that if in the senior years people become even more material, they will suffer more. "We come naked and go naked" as the saying tells.

My father used to say that people collect things, like T.V.'s, and fancy clothes because they think they are all alone. They are lonely. They do not think of God, and do not really know themselves. At least self-knowledge they should cultivate.

## 16. DEATH RITES

On a sand dune overlooking the ocean lies SWARGA DWAR, aptly named "the doorway to Heaven." This is the final resting place of all in Puri, as dead bodies are cremated here. In GEETA, it is stated,

"BHAGABANA DUITHARA HASANTI:

1. MANISHA KAHE 'MO SAMPATI.
2. MU AMARA!"

"God laughs twice!  
Once when man tells,  
'This is my property!'  
And twice when he thinks,  
'I will never die!'"

As a dead body is carried to  
SWARGA DWAR, the men chant,

"RAMA NAMA SATHYA HEY!"

This sound of acceptance and completion shows the way people treat death and dying here. One should live and die in a state of Grace, that is, with the name of God on one's lips.

Old people are proud of their advanced age in



## COMMON ORIYA SAYINGS OF ELDERS

### On **DOCTORS:**

"ABARSARA ROGI ASANTA BARSARA DOCTOR!"

"The patient of this year is the doctor of next year!"

### On **ACHES** and **PAINS** of old age:

"SABUDINA PUNEIRATI ACHHI KI?"

"Do you expect to see the full moon every day?"

### On **MAKING ADJUSTMENTS** to changes in one's life:

"JHADA BADA GAUCHHAKU, NASTA KARE GHASSA, NASTA HUE NAHI!"

"A big tree falls in a storm, but not a blade of grass!"

The meaning is that one's mind needs to be flexible to the changes in one's life.

### On **FAMILY DISPUTES:**

"DUE JANAKU SANTUSTA KALE, LAVA!"

"If you plead for both parties, you'll have double profit!" (also said to lawyers)

### On **INDISCIPLINE** in a home:

"CHAKA DHILAKU AKHA DHILA."

"The wheel is loose, and the axle broken!"

This means that due to such indiscipline, a house will never run smoothly.

### On **WORK:**

"DUE NAUKARE GODA, DELE PRANA JIBA!"

"If you put your feet in two boats, you'll drown!"

In the West persons often hold two or more jobs. Here one is told not to divide his attention, but do one work well.

### On **BRIBERY:**

"APANA BUDHIRE YOGI HEBA, PARA BUDDHIRE RAJA HEBA NAHIN."

"It is better to listen to your own conscience, than try to be king on the advice and promises of others."

### On **BAD ACTIONS:**

"KADUAKU GALE, GODA DHOIBAKU PADE."

"If you go to a muddy place, you have to wash your feet afterwards."

### On **GOOD PEOPLE:**

"DHINKI SWARGAKU GALE DHANA KUTE!"

"If your kitchen blender goes to Heaven, it will be good there also."

The meaning is that good people are good everywhere.

### On **HEALTH** in old age:

"KHAI SOILE BADHAI AYU, KHAI DHAILE BADHAI BAYU, KHAI BASILE BADHAI PETA, KHAI KHAILE JAMARA BHETA"

"If you sleep after eating, you will live long.

If you walk after eating, you will get gas.

If you sit after eating, you will get fat.

If you eat after eating, you will die soon!"

### On **MONEY MATTERS:**

"JETIKI CHUNA SETIKI PITHAI!"

"It just depends on how much flour is there, that many chakuli pithas we can make!"

### On **COMPASSION:**

"MORA JOTA NAHIN,

KINTU MU DEKHILI,

ANYAR PADA NAHIN!"

"I was complaining that I had no good shoes, until I saw a man who had no feet!"

### On **AGING:**

"CHANA THILE DANTA NAHI!"

DANTA THILE CHANA NAHI!"

"When you have teeth, salty nuts are not available (they are too costly), but when they are available, you have no teeth!"

### On **MAN'S DESTINY:**

"PHAL JAKA TORA,

JHOLA JAKA MORA."

"You may want potatoes, but you only get soup!"

The meaning is that man only proposes, God disposes!

### On **GOD:**

"CUPARE CHA THILAPARI AME,

KEBALA BHAGABANAKU BOHUCHHU"

"We are carrying God around with us, like a teapot carries tea!"

### On **SPIRITUAL PRACTICE:**

"NABIRATO DUSCHARITANNA SANTO NASAMAHITA."

"One whose dealings are not selfless, one whose mind is not peaceful, one whose heart is not one-pointed, will never get God."

### On **MOKSHA**, or Liberation:

"NIRBODHAR SUKHA DURARE, GNANINKAR NIKATARE."

"A foolish man seeks happiness in the distance, a wise man knows it grows under his feet."



*Reflecting on life, Hari Har Khuntia takes a moment's rest with his grandchildren. As an elder having seen 100 years, he is much revered in the worshipper community.*







Puri as it brings with it much respect from one and all. To young people, the very old often say, "I have seen 90 springs so what can you tell me that I don't already know! This body is a temple of diseases. I have a train ticket, only the train is late and I am simply waiting on the platform! You haven't even filled out the reservation form yet! You still have many things to learn."

To a grey-haired old lady, toothless and with stick in hand, people ask jokingly, "When is your marriage day?" She smilingly replies, "My marriage day is that day on which all my family surrounds me!" This is her last wish, that with all family members present, like for all other auspicious occasions in one's life, she will die. The family has been her great love for which she has sacrificed herself throughout life.

As for Heaven, widows often say,

"APANAR SWARTH  
SWARGAKU HINA KARE."

"One who lives for himself alone, acquires ill, even though he may call it Heaven!"

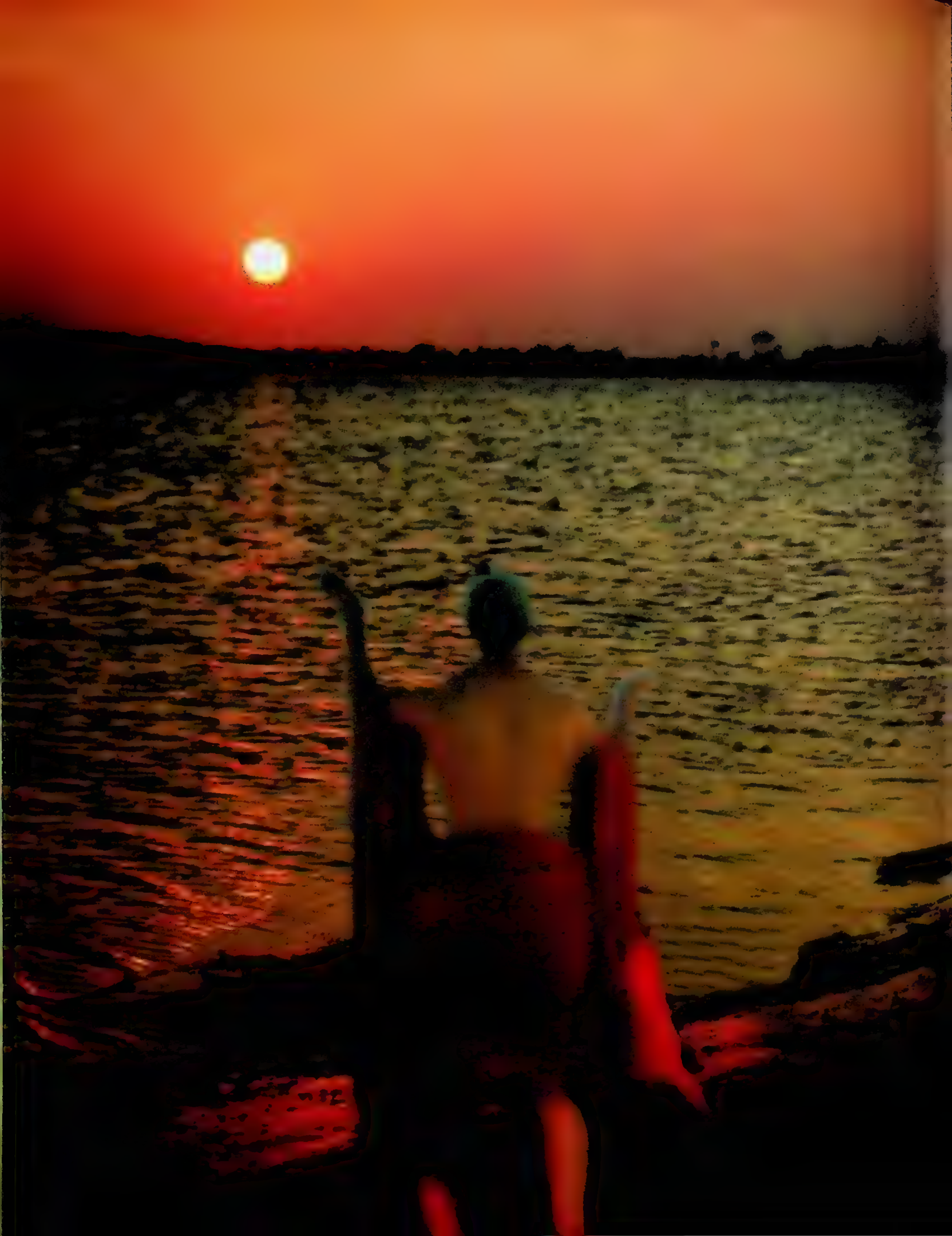
Like old people everywhere, the elder generations of Puri are eternal wellsprings of humor and wisdom. They have a saying for everything, even for the word SAYING itself,

"PRABACHANA CHHOTA KINTU,  
BADA ANUBHUTIRU ASI THAE."

"A proverb is a short sentence, but coming from a long experience!"

*Opposite: As the final resting place of all in Puri, SWARGA DWAR means "Gateway to Heaven." Many come to Puri in their old age so they may die in this holy town.*





# IMAGEMAKERS

"OM PURNAMADAH PURNAMIDAM,  
PURNAT PURNA MUDACHYATE,  
PURNASYA PURNAMADAYA,  
PURNAMEBA BASISYATE."

"Om, Fullness minus fullness  
is also fullness."

"If one gives away everything for others,  
His treasure house can never be emptied."

a fond quotation of Hari Har Guru,  
a great PANDA of Jagannath Temple

"The true history of the world is the history of a  
few."

Max Muller,  
Heritage of India, 1882

The name of Hari Har Guru, who lived in the 19th century (1804–1876), is remembered with the greatest reverence and respect by rich and poor alike. He was called a PRAKRUTA PANDA, a genuine worshipper in the temple of Lord Jagannath, and whose whole life was a practical illustration of this teaching.

As he was my mother's great grandfather, I often heard stories about him as a child. One day as he was sitting at Narendra Tank reciting Sandhya mantras (evening mantras), as was his daily practice, he heard a man shouting, "Where is my panda? Where is Hari Har Guru?" No one was willing to bring the poor man to Hari Har Guru, as the man had leprosy. But Hari Har Guru heard him and immediately left his meditation, went to him and embraced him. He told the horrified throng of bystanders, "Whenever my name is called, whatever the disease, I will go and embrace that man as my guest and serve him as my God."

*Opposite: Whether Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu left this mortal world in Jagannath Temple or disappeared into the sea remains a mystery. But it is an established fact that he spent the last twelve years of his life in Puri.*





*Known as a PRAKRUTA PANDA, a genuine worshipper of Lord Jagannath, Hari Har Guru is even today revered for his great generosity to one and all.*

At that, the man dropped his leper's dress. He had only come hidden in such a disguise to avoid robbers on the way. He was actually a rich man from a distant village and he fell at Hari Har Guru's feet, pouring gold coins on them. Hari Har Guru immediately distributed them to all around. His only happiness was in helping others.

Hari Har Guru would borrow money only to give it to someone in need. During his lifetime more than 50% of the poor Brahmin boys of Puri area and sons of poor temple worshippers were given holy thread ceremony by him, even though

he had limited funds. His only condition was that they promise to recite the Oriya BHAGAVATA for 21 days in his house after the ceremony.

Only after putting on the holy thread could one engage in spiritual activities such as puja and GEETA or VEDA recitation. Hari Har Guru wished to encourage young minds to grow in this way so he helped them.

Loans he repaid with interest. Once he was in difficulty repaying a loan. That man was so bent upon getting his money back that he took Hari Har Guru to court. The lawyer advised the panda

to deny taking the loan. But when the judge asked him in court, "Did you take a loan from this man?" Hari Har Guru replied simply, "Yes, but I was advised to deny it!" All laughed, such a truthful simple man he was! That loan was repaid gradually.

The only formal education he had was Chata-sali school training as a small boy. There he was taught to read and write and recite holy texts according to the old traditions.

His only work was temple seva. Belonging to the Pratihari Nijog, his duty was to invite cooks to bring BHOGA, or food offerings, to the temple for puja. In those days members of this Nijog enforced discipline among pilgrims inside the temple; there were no police officers.

But Hari Har Guru was of delicate constitution, so he mostly served to guide and advise pilgrims from distant parts of India, especially from Uttar Pradesh, his family's traditional pilgrim territory.

At that time there was no train even. Devotees came by ship or walked, often with much difficulty. He himself never went as a panda of Jagannath Temple to these areas because he could not bear being without the darshan of Lord Jagannath for even a day.

It was Hari Har Guru's daily habit to see the first morning ritual in the temple, called MANGALA ARATI, and only after that did he take food or water. If he saw a worshipper wearing a torn dhoti, he would send another worshipper to buy one for him.

Perhaps Hari Har Guru's greatest quality was his soft-spoken nature. He only smiled, even in the face of sorrow or monetary difficulties. His wife was his spiritual support in all these good works; no one ever saw him quarreling. He ordered a special BHOGA of KHECHERI rice daily from the temple. He ate a little from this big pot and distributed the rest. His descendents still continue this tradition. He also started the practice of PANTI in Puri, that is, the offering of BHOGA by local residents as the deities pass by on such days as RATH YATRA, CHANDAN

YATRA, Lord Shiva and Lord Krishna's Marriage Days, and during SAHI YATRA to Lord Rama. He paid all the young men who helped to carry the huge Barbati Durga to the temple during DURGA PUJA days. More than 200 strong boys are necessary. His family still continues this practice today.

Hari Har Guru's greatest advice was this, "In this Kali Yuga, help ever, young or old, rich or poor, anyone in need." He was fondly called MAHADANI HARI HAR by the local people. Even though he was not a rich man, in a small way he gave to all. He was also very fond of birds; he fed them from his own plate, even the crows, before he himself ate.

The worshipper community revered him as God Himself, so selfless he was. When he was very old, he used to be carried in a palanquin on the shoulders of local boys daily to have darshan of Lord Jagannath. Little children would run after him. He would give them small coins and distribute cold medicine, called NASA POWDER, to the ones with runny noses. As he passed by, all the people and sevakas would stand to the side, hands folded respectfully in NAMASKAR greeting.

When Hari Har Guru died, he was sitting erect, meditating in padmasana posture. It is believed that only very great souls can die in this way, with their minds so immersed in God.

Hari Har Guru was always poor, financially. When he died, his sons and grandsons became very thoughtful because there was no money in the house. After one or two years, however, many pilgrims began to come, hearing of the greatness of their father. They donated money and today they are still coming in the name of Hari Har Guru. A Guru Dharmasala has been built where they can now stay while having darshan of the Lord in Puri.

Although their field of activity was totally different, Hari Har Guru and Chakhi Khuntia are looked upon with the same weight by the people



of Orissa. Also a sevaka of Jagannath Temple, Chakhi Khuntia belonged to our family's Khuntia Nijog. His ancestral house stands beside ours.

Chakhi Khuntia was a great warrior saint of the 1800's. Every year on the anniversary of his death, a grand function is held, for he is one of the primary cultural heroes who have shaped the minds of Orissan youth today.

Born in 1830, he was called Chandan Hazuri because his father prayed to Lord Jagannath at CHANDAN LAGI time in the temple that a son be born to carry on his seva. He was soon nicknamed "Chakhi," because of his habit of first tasting the BHOGA to be offered to the Lord, before his mother could stop him. CHAKHI means "to taste to see whether it is good or not."

Even in his youth, Chakhi Khuntia was well-known for his physical and spiritual strength. He could swim across the huge thick waters of Narendra Tank four or five times, which no other boy of Puri could do.

Even more amazing, he could lift the wheel of Lord Jagannath's Rath all by himself. This story has become one of the great legends surrounding him.

One day after RATH YATRA Festival, the king of Puri saw the young man walking past the Rath. His age was about 20. The king asked why he looked so sad. Chakhi Khuntia replied that there was no firewood in his house for cooking. Jokingly, the king told him to take two wheels of the Lord's own chariot to use.

To the king's utter amazement, the boy lifted up two big wheels and rolled them home! Chakhi Khuntia was a very big man. To see his bed or food thali, one is amazed. Both are four times normal size!

Yet his real greatness came later, due to his great inner spiritual strength. In 1817 the ruler of the kingdom of Jhansi in Uttar Pradesh came to Puri with his daughter Lakshmibai. The father of Chakhi Khuntia introduced his son with these words, "If I am dead, and you face any difficulty, my son will come to help you." True to his father's

command, the son did just that.

In 1845 the British rulers of India passed an order that all property would be annexed to the British Empire if there was no adult heir. At that time Lakshmibai's husband had died and she had only an infant son. Her brothers and advisors were all weak and irresponsible. In desperation she wrote to Chakhi Khuntia to please come to help.

Before going there, Chakhi Khuntia went to the temple and prayed at the temple door, singing this bhajan\* that he himself had composed,

"CHAKA NAYANAKU PATITA KAH,  
TAKAI KHARA NISWASA PAKAI,  
DAKA BAJUCHHI MAHIMA HEE.  
LAJJA HARI NA TARILE NIKARA,  
DWAJA CHAKRARU BAHANA UTARA.  
THANDA KARI KRUPAJALA BRUSTIKARA,  
MO CHITTA CHATAKA PAKSHI."

"Oh round-eyed Jagannath,  
You are known for hearing the prayers of so many,  
Your glory is spread far and wide,  
But why do I sigh when I remember You?  
If You cannot hear me,  
May Your flag be taken down  
From NILACHAKRA!  
Is there no sword with You  
To kill my sorrows?  
My CHITTA CHATAKA bird\* will die,  
If You do not rain Your mercy on me!"

Just then a flag from the top of the temple fell on his head. He tied it to his head and left on horseback alone to Jhansi.

Chakhi Khuntia thus became one of the first freedom fighters of modern India. Along with two

\* He is known to have composed more than 52 bhajans but only this one remains.

\* A CHATAKA bird is a real bird in the mountains of Orissa that drinks only pure rain water. It is a symbol of the soul and is said to also live in the heart of man.



*A devout worshipper of Jagannath Temple and one of India's first freedom fighters against the British, Chakhi Khuntia is remembered for his bravery and great spiritual strength.*

other great patriots, Nanasaheb and Tantiatope, they led the queen and people of Jhansi to resist the British Empire. All fought with sword the British invaders. The queen herself was killed.

When about to be arrested, the three advisors hid in the deep forest. Chakhi Khuntia went to Nepal, and for twenty days he went without food or water. After eight to ten years, he returned to Puri.

His wife, believing him to be dead, had performed his death rites and wore the dress of a widow. The British had confiscated his property. He was arrested immediately in Puri by the British and had to report daily to the authorities. Later the British collector Armstrong returned his property and pilgrims began to come in his name to Jagannath Temple.

This Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 marked the begin-

ning of the resistance movement in India. Jhansi was the hallowed place. If one of the queen's advisors had not been treacherous, the outcome might have been very different.

The British bribed that man to reveal defense secrets and open the gates of the palace. They promised him that he would be made king of Jhansi. After this betrayal, the British general replied, "If you were not loyal to your queen, you will never be loyal to me!" and had him executed.

This uprising changed the minds of the Indian people. They realized that they could indeed resist the might of the British Empire. It has been said that if the freedom movement in Jhansi had been successful, it would not have been necessary for Gandhi to be born. The victory was to come later.

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served the people in distress. On his deathbed, his last words were, "Jay Jagannath!"

Throughout the history of Puri great souls have come here. In 1455 A.D. the great poet-saint Kabir of North India was actually invited to come to Puri by the king.

At that time the ocean was much nearer Jagannath Temple. High waves were threatening to destroy the temple itself. The Raja was deeply worried and depressed. In a dream Lord Jagannath came and told him what to do, saying, "I have one devotee, called Kabir. If he meditates here, he will stop the waves."

So the king called for him and Kabir came. On the spot where he stood in meditation stands the Kabir Dhyana Mandir today. From that time to the present neither Puri nor Jagannath Temple have been threatened by tidal waves from the sea.

Kabir was Hindu by birth, but his mother became a converted Muslim. A born saint with great siddhi powers, Kabir was always beyond distinctions of caste and creed; and as such, he was truly Lord Jagannath's "one devotee."

Although other great philosophers and saints, such as Adishankar, Ramanuja, Guru Nanak, Jayadev, Sarada Devi, the wife of Ramakrishna, and Sri Yukteswar and his famous disciple Swami Yogananda Paramahansa who taught in the West, have all made a pilgrimage to Puri down through the centuries, perhaps no one has left such an indelible mark on the hearts of the people as Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the Bengali Vaishnavite saint who spent the last twelve years of his life in Puri.

From 1510 A.D. onwards, he and his many followers in Puri initiated young and old, king and sevaka alike, into his own divine madness. They used to go out from Puri to distant Orissan temples and other places for namasankirtan, but always returned by RATH YATRA day.

Before the chariots he used to sing and dance in an ecstatic mood. He was called HARI NAMA

MURTI, or "God's name incarnate," by his contemporary Oriya poet Sadananda. Other great poets of the day, the PANCHAKSAKHA, especially Jagannath Das who wrote the Oriya version of BHAGAVATA, were his personal friends. A close spiritual bond developed between Orissa and the rival state of Bengal due to the teachings of Sri Chaitanya.

Chaitanya's philosophy of ACINTYA BHEDA BHEDA blossomed and spread due to the support he received in Shreekshestra. ACINTYA means "that which cannot be thought of," and BHEDA BHEDA means "no division or separation from God." Man is part and parcel of the divine. It was the direct personal experience of Sri Chaitanya that man can have union with God.

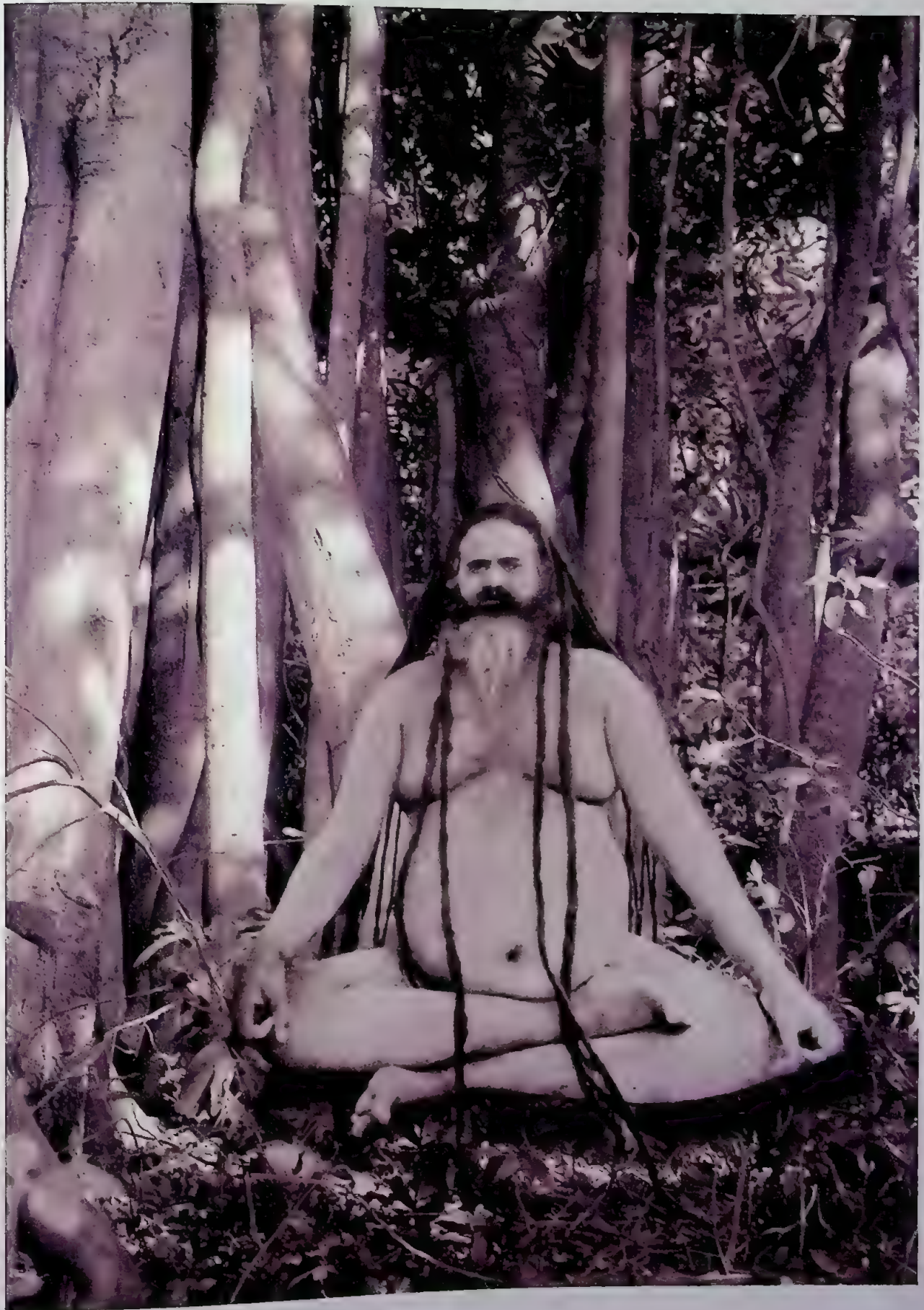
Sri Chaitanya left this mortal world in Puri. Some say that he merged into the deity of Lord Jagannath. Some say he was buried in the temple burial grounds for the deities, KOILI VAIKUNTHA. KOILI means burial ground and VAIKUNTHA is the heavenly abode of Lord Vishnu. Others say that he saw the form of Lord Jagannath floating on the ocean and with arms outstretched, he ran into the ocean to meet Him.

Many other great saints have come and settled in the rarefied atmosphere of Puri. In recent times the most illustrious of these was the "naked saint," or NAGA-SANNYASI, Totapuri, Sri Sri Digambar Baba.

He was a renunciate of the highest order and founded Advaita Brahma Ashram where one can still go and meditate under the awe-inspiring

*Opposite: Sri Digambar Baba, also known as Totapuri, was one of the most illustrious saints who ever came to Puri.*







stillness of his banyan tree. Only the sweet hum of honey bees and the distant roar of the ocean interrupt this silence.

During British times, the Puri collector Armstrong happened to meet him walking on the beach one day. As "nakedness" is forbidden in England, he was arrested and put in jail on grounds of "public indecency."

But as Armstrong looked outside his window above the jail, he saw Totapuri first up on the roof, then down on the street, then back up on the roof many times. Astounded, he released him, realizing that he was no ordinary soul. When freed, Totapuri informed the Britisher that his son had met an accident in America. That night a telegram was delivered. The son had indeed been in an accident and died.

It is said that Sri Digambar Baba was the same historically famed Vedantic, "Totapuri Maharaj," who taught mysterious secrets concerning Vedanta to Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa at Dakshineswar in the year 1863. Digambar Baba lived at least 150 years, leaving his mortal frame in Puri in 1961.

Some say that he lived over 400 years, as a naked sadhu resembling him was seen in Bihar, Bengal, and Orissa during these years. He was renowned for his remarkable spiritual powers.

Although little is known about him, his influence was great. People called him the "living Brahman," whose darshan removed all sins and whose blessings saved one from all sorrows. My father and grandfather went several times and I, in my youth, also went once. I was a very skeptical college lad and with some friends journeyed there out of curiosity. We climbed the big hill over the sand dunes to the hut beside the banyan tree where he stayed. He was standing at the door, "waiting" for us, or so it seemed! His immense frame filled the whole doorway, his huge belly greatly extended with divine Prana.

Just to see him was a thing never to be forgotten. To me he proclaimed that he was a stupid illiterate man and knew nothing, yet on that day

he told me things not only about my past, but also about my future, all of which have come true.

In those days that place was very lonely and hard to reach. One had to walk along a dirt path, through thorny bushes and thick jungles infested with snakes. This gigantic spiritual figure sat in silence most of the time, in padmasana on a tiger skin with eyes closed, either on his cot or outside by the banyan tree. Often he gave his blessings in silence also by simply raising his hand.

To worldly minds it comes as a great awakening to meet such a soul who has always stayed alone in a lonely forest away from human habitation. What is that joy for which he has rejected everything in this world?

When asked his age, he once replied, "Ask this banyan tree its age." Then after a pause he said, "I am unborn, I have no birth."

Revealing a great secret behind silence, he said, "Anger is the worst of all passions. It spoils everything. Control your speech and talk less." Learned persons from nearby and also abroad used to come to this great saint for interview. He is said to have given life back to a dead man\* and sight to a blind boy.

As all great souls, Totapuri was devoted to alleviating the sufferings of mankind. To meet him one automatically could realize how little is really necessary to sustain oneself in this world.

He used to say,

"Your true nature is unlimited. Without this awareness, there can be no permanent peace of mind."

When asked how to distinguish between a true and a false sadhu, Baba once replied, "Sometimes people mistake a false sadhu for a real one. But the behavior and activities of the man who has disciplined his mind, who is a true sadhu, will be different. If you look at him, you will see that

\* There are many stories, but the most famous story is of the dead Rajkumar of Bhawal. A king in the state of Bengal was mysteriously killed in a legal fight over his property. Thirty years later Totapuri "resurrected" him and the dead Rajkumar of Bhawal returned to his native place and won a court case restoring his property to him!



*A famous astrologer of Puri in the 18th century, Samant Chandrasekhar studied the stars with only a bamboo telescope. His horoscope predictions almost always came true, even his own death date.*

his face is clear and calm, and he is at peace. His mind is desireless.”

The setting of Digambara Baba's Advaita Brahma Ashram, even today, looks very much like a small hermitage of the ancient sages, as described in Indian stories. The same banyan tree near which Baba used to sit is still standing there as a silent witness to its glorious visitor in the past.

As to why it is so difficult for householders to get peace and happiness, he used to say, “Like a woman buying glass bangles, they themselves want these things. So they wilfully follow the wrong path and become burdened with problems and difficulties. When the glass bangles break, they experience pain.”

Digambara Baba was unparalleled. It is said that such Brahma Acharyas appear on earth only occasionally to shower their blessings on the entire world. Surprisingly, at the time of Sri Sri Baba, only a few people used to visit him. But

most people in this age want only worldly pleasures, not spiritual knowledge.

Once the impurities of the mind are removed, the truth discloses itself. An impure mind can never be happy.” Totapuri loved to listen to VEDANTA SASTRA,

“VEDANTA is such a wonderful bridge, even an ant can cross the river of bondage on it.”

Digambara Baba also loved the teachings on BRAHMAN JNANA in KATHOPANISHAD, explaining the nature of the soul, or ATMA BRAHMA in man.

When man's sense organs are directed outwards and running after external things, men can see only the outside world and not the ATMA within.

“Separate the ATMA from the sheaths of the body, like the blades of the grass, with patience and understanding,” so says KATHOPANISHAD.

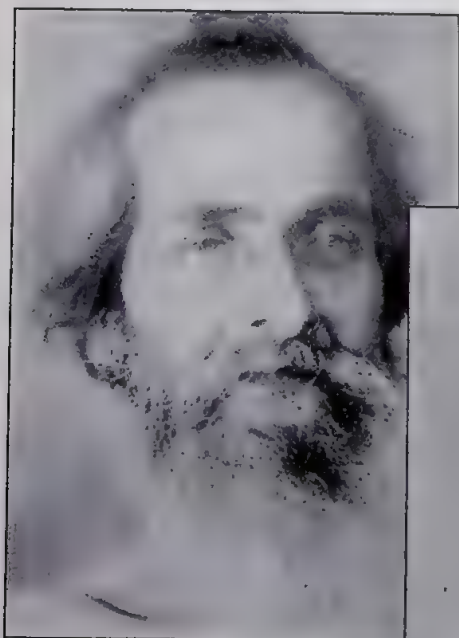




Gopabandhu Dash



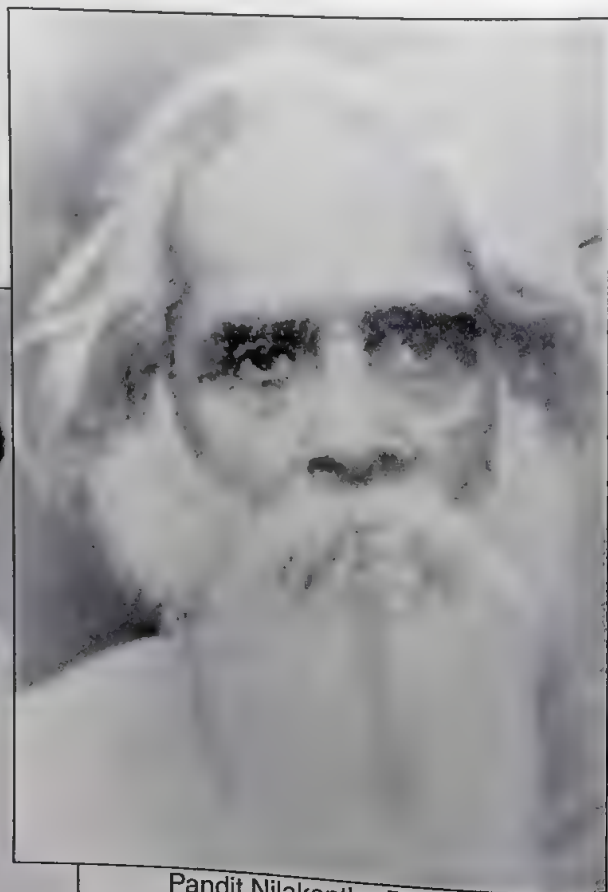
Godabarish Mishra



Achariya Hari Har Dash



Krupasindhu Mishra



Pandit Nilakantha Dash

It continues, "when water is poured into water, it becomes one and the same."

The real journey of man is from separateness to oneness. During man's lifetime, he sees himself in one of three ways. First he is somebody (under the influence of ego); then nobody (under the influence of humility), then everybody.

This is true VEDANTA taught by the ancient seers of India and by Sri Digambara Baba in Puri in modern times. When the knots of the mind are untied, worldly desires die out and attachments disappear; then mortals become immortal. This is the essence of his teachings.

From time immemorial, India, and Puri especially, has been a place of sages, yogis, and holy men, who appear for the benefit of the people, live their brief life of glory, and then disappear.

It is our misfortune, especially those of us living in their midst in places like Puri, that we are not able to take advantage of their divine powers, that we are unable to realize that they are a lighthouse of spiritual knowledge.

All varieties of great souls have contributed to the life and soul of Puri, poet saints such as Jayadev and the Muslim singer Salebega, musician devotees such as Singhari Shyama Sundar Kar, holy sevakas of Jagannath Temple such as Hari Har Guru and Jairam Singhari, learned astrologers and mathematicians such as Baikunthanath Pratihari and Samant Chandrasekhar.

*Opposite: Known as the PANCHAKSAKHA, or "Five friends," Gopabandhu Dash, Pandit Nilakantha Dash, Krupasindhu Mishra, Acharjya Hari Har Dash, and Godabarish Mishra were selfless idealistic thinkers who served Orissa during the freedom movement.*

Yet in modern times the school teacher saint Gopabandhu shines out above them all. So much he felt the sufferings of others, he could not sleep when distant schoolboys were suffering from flood conditions and epidemics.

His own little son lay dying, but he went out to collect funds to help them, saying, "Is this my only son who is sick?" In his own school hostel, he would often cry and not eat, thinking too much of the poor boys in poverty-stricken school areas. In one of his most famous poems, he wrote,

"MISU MORA DEHA A DESHA MATIRE,  
DESHABASI CHALI JAANTU PITHIRE.  
DESARA SWARAJYA PATHE JETE GADHA,  
PURU TAHIN PADI MORA MANSHA HADA."

"Let my body feed the soil of this land,  
And the potholes that are there on the road  
to Swaraj,  
May those be filled with my bones and  
flesh,  
So that my countrymen may walk on it."

Perhaps because Gopabandhu's early days were extremely difficult, he could feel the sufferings of the poor so much. Born in 1877, his own mother died when he was a baby. His father was very poor and died when the boy was in high school.

Gopabandhu obtained a law degree, yet after graduation he burned it as fake and fraudulent. He denounced the corrupt conduct of lawyers and the school education system of his day. He said that schools only taught a boy how to make a big salary, not service to society.

This idealistic spirit led him and four friends to found a very innovative type of school. Meeting on the banks of Bhargabi River, they vowed to work together in such a way that when they died, their country would be a little better off.

The school was an open-air school in Sakshigopal village near Puri, called SATYABADI. The five friends were Pandit Nilakantha



Dash, Pandit Godabarish Mishra, Pandit Krupasindhu Mishra, Acharjya Hari Har Dash, and Gopabandhu Dash.

Pandit Nilakantha Dash was a great scholar and devotee of Lord Jagannath. Pandit Godavarish Mishra, a master of English, rejected offers as visiting Professor of English in foreign colleges to help his "sons and daughters" here. Pandit Krupasindhu Mishra, an expert historian and lively storyteller, brought history to life before the very eyes of children.

Acharjya Hari Har Dash, a great teacher of English grammar and mathematics, wrote a classic book on English grammar for children, called "A Child's Easy First Grammar," which is still used today.

Teaching under the branches of trees, with not even school benches and only one student hostel, they vowed to "make men, not limbs to run an office!" Today these five men are fondly revered as "the PANCHAKSA," the five friends, as in the literary world there were the PANCHAKSA of the 16th century also.

I once met Acharjya Hari Har Dash. ACHARJYA is a title given, meaning "a very good man." That he was. He was also called SATYARA PUJARI, "worshipper of truth." My college club had invited him to come and speak. He did but apologized, saying, "Dear children, I stand before you as an unfit speaker because I do not do as I say."

His behavior would buy you, his shining presence. To people in general he told only one sentence, "Be a good man." A strict disciplinarian, he would make a boy stand up in front of all if his work was not done. But then he would ask, "Have you eaten; is your mother well; do you have a notebook and pen?" If the boy cried, he would cry also. So much was his compassion.

Gopabandhu was of this same nature. The school accepted no tuition fees; it was free for all and run along the lines of the old Gurukula school system. To raise money, the five friends went to local people for donations, not the

government. Gopabandhu never used a vehicle. He went walking so that he could meet the people.

Married at the age of 12, Gopabandhu lost his wife at an early age also. After that he really had no personal life; he lived only for others. The boys in his school not only had free education, but also free lodging, food, dress, and school supplies.

The great poet laureate of Bengal, Rabindranath Tagore once visited the school. He was so impressed that he decided to start a similar school outside Calcutta. That school is now the internationally famous Shanti Niketan.

In Gopabandhu's school, the older students taught the younger ones. There were morning prayers and evening arati, all standing out under the big banyan tree. The teachers and students lived and ate together in the same hostel. Competitions were held in VEDA and GEETA recitations. Students not only studied hard, but also did seva projects, such as building roads and going to distant areas to help flood victims. They were the volunteers at RATH YATRA, helping the pilgrims.

When they returned from holidays, Gopabandhu used to ask, "Have you not helped one man at least? If not, how will your village ever prosper?"

Gopabandhu was fond of saying,

"If you want to serve people,  
Your feet should be on mother Earth,  
And the sun on your chest."

This means that one must do physical labor oneself; one must have direct personal contact with people. He also said,

"If you go to the poor people in fair weather, you are simply their guest, but if you go to them in rain and storm, you are their friend."

The first daily newspaper of Orissa was started by Gopabandhu. My father, who was very



*At a historic meeting with Gandhiji and his wife in 1921,  
Gopabandhu addresses the local gathering.*





*Many followed in the footsteps of Gopabandhu, such as Dr. Radhanath Rath, editor of SAMAJ newspaper, here walking to a fire-gutted village to distribute food and medical supplies.*

traditional and almost illiterate, once surprised me by asking for a newspaper. I brought five or six. He threw them all at me, shouting, "These are not SAMAJ!"

The two-page SAMAJ meant newspaper in Orissa; it was and still is "the people's paper." As editor, Gopabandhu promoted these high ideals among the common man. Meaning "society" the newspaper instilled the spirit of social service and self-sacrifice among all the people of Orissa. Himself a poet, he wrote,

"NA ATAKE KARMA NETARA AVABE,  
DHARMA NABA CHALE DHARMARA  
PRAVABE,  
BISESE UTKALE NAHI PRAYOJANA,  
UTKALINA NETA NIJE NARAYANA."

"Work does not stop if there is no leader,  
The religion of a boat is floated by the force  
of religion itself,

Especially in Orissa,  
Because the real leader, or force,  
Is Lord Jagannath Himself."

Gopabandhu changed the minds of people. As a young man, the centenarian editor of SAMAJ, Padmabhusan Radhanath Rath left highly-paid government service and dedicated his life to him, saying, "If I am to do anything in my life, I must become a disciple of Pandit Gopabandhu."

"Let truth prevail" became the motto of his life also; and without fear, he served the people as editor-in-chief of SAMAJ for more than seventy-five years. He spread the philosophy of Gopabandhu through the newspaper, saying, "The views of SAMAJ and the glorious path shown by Gopabandhu are one and the same."

It is said that even today no one in distress returns from SAMAJ office or the house of Radhanath Rath empty-handed. On my last visit, I myself was asked by the 100 year old gentle-

man himself, "Have you eaten?"

As a college student, I went to SAMAJ office once to ask for a school donation for our student excursion. He replied sharply, "No donation, I will send a bus!"

Such was the inspiration of his illustrious guru. Once invited to a huge marriage feast, Gopabandhu refused to go because that type of rich food was not available for all. On another occasion, he was presented with a fancy dhoti. Returning it, he said, "How many people in India have no cloth, so how can I wear this?"

Many of the teachings and principles of SATYABADI SCHOOL were revolutionary in those times. Pandit Nilakantha Dash kept a moustache, although he was a Brahmin. Achariya Hari Har wore a beard, but no moustache. Brahmins were supposed to be clean-shaven or not shaven at all. These were Muslim styles.

Thus the five friends fought against the blind beliefs and traditions of Hindus. They ate with boys of low-caste and all religions.

Such teachings were the heart and soul of Gopabandhu long before he ever met Gandhi. At the age of fourteen, he wrote in a poem, "Hinduism is Humanism; a true Hindu is meant not for his own self, but for all humanity."

Later he wrote, "In my eyes, every mosque is Jagannath Temple; and one may call the Almighty by any name you like, Rama or Rahim."

However destiny prevails. Perhaps because their beliefs were so similar, Gandhi and Gopabandhu were destined to meet. That eventful day occurred in 1920 at a Congress Party meeting in Calcutta, eight years before Gopabandhu's death.

Gopabandhu invited Gandhiji to Orissa and in 1921 Gandhi came and visited the Sakshigopal school. Gopabandhu told him, "If you see the poverty of the people due to the floods in Orissa, you will forget the freedom movement!"

When Gandhi saw the Sakshigopal villagers coming to meet him in torn dhoti and torn sari and giving donations of small change, his heart

melted and he said, "Your one paisa is worth one million rupees to me."

At that time the British government of Orissa had just passed Decree 144, forbidding anyone to meet or talk with Gandhi. But Gopabandhu made the people fearless, telling people it was better to go work on the land than work for the British. In a poem Gopabandhu wrote about Gandhi,

"All can make a wooden Jagannath, but no one but Gandhi can put Brahma inside!"

Gandhi instilled this true spirit of Hinduism in the hearts and minds of people.

In another article, Gopabandhu wrote, "All men are made by society, but only a few can remake society!" Gandhi and Gopabandhu were two of those rare few. Orissa was in need of a man like Gopabandhu, as India needed Gandhi.

Both were extraordinary leaders, whose lives were a true example of their teachings. Both were writers, editors of newspapers, and law school graduates.

They believed in simple living and high thinking. Selfless, fearless, and never money-minded, they sacrificed their lives for the good of the country.

To uphold the sacred traditions and revive the glorious past of India was their mission. To alleviate the sufferings of the poor masses and make them self-sufficient was their goal.

To expand the consciousness of the ordinary Hindu to embrace all men as equal was their only religion.

When asked to join Gandhi in Calcutta, Gopabandhu refused, saying, "If one limb of a lady suffers from cancer, how can she be cured? Let Orissa prosper first."

This was his motto and his lifetime duty, so all Congress Party work in Orisa was given to him. Gopabandhu never left Orissa; he gave his life for Orissa. Due to his anti-British articles,



Gopabandhu was put in prison many times.

During one of these occasions, some rich conservative Hindus of Sakshigopal burned down his school. They accused him of preaching "bad things."

The actual school lasted only about fifteen years, yet in the minds of people of Orissa it can never be burned out.

By dint of all Gopabandhu's good works, people gathered to see him, just like they did for Gandhi. A great karma yogi, he represented the best qualities of a man, self-sacrifice, kindness, love, and compassion for all.

Shortly after Independence, the government of Orissa erected a statue of Gopabandhu, not only in front of the government Assembly Hall, but also in front of the main gate of Jagannath Temple itself.

Not a great philosopher, or great renunciate, but a humble school teacher stands before the pilgrims entering the great temple.

The reason for this may best be explained in Gopabandhu's own words,

"A great man is great,  
Not for what he does,  
But for what he is."

A very kind man, never angry or frustrated in spite of difficulties or criticism, Gopabandhu won the heart of all Orissa. His life was an example of total love and self-sacrifice.

He never took medicine himself, in spite of constant contact with malaria, bad water, and cholera. Consequently, he suffered from many fevers. Yet this never stopped him. With chuda, rice and vegetables, he continued to go out to flood and epidemic areas.

Thus it was that after one such mission of love to Calcutta in 1928, he returned with high fevers and died. His age was only 51.

Today Gopabandhu is revered as UTKALMANI, "the jewel of Orissa," and given the title, "the Gandhi of Orissa." But perhaps his life

can best be summed up in his own words,

"SWADHINATAPATHE TILE HELE NARA,  
MO JIBANA DANE HEU AGRASARA.  
MANGALAMAYANKA SUMANGALA ICHHA,  
PURU A PARANE EHI SESA VIKSHA."

"May the offering of my life advance a whit,  
The cause of man's freedom in this bright  
land,  
And the will of God be fulfilled in my life,  
This is, oh Lord, my last prayer  
on this side."

*Opposite: The name of Gopabandhu became a household word after his martyr's death in service to the poor at the age of 51. Today he is revered as the "Gandhi of Orissa."*







# ART AND LIFE

"SRI JAYADEVA BHANITA MIDAMUDAYATI,  
HARI CHARANAM SMIRTI SARAM,  
SARASAM VASANTA SAMAYA  
VANA VARNANAM,  
MANUGATA MADANA VIKARAM . . ."

Sanskrit sloka from Jayadeva's  
GEETA GOVINDA

"Sri Jayadeva's song evokes  
The powerful poignant memory of Hari's feet,  
Like the fullness of Love in Springtime,  
Coloring the forest with Love's sweet essence.  
Following Madana, the Lord of Love,  
Removes all wrong,  
And only the imprint of His Love remains . . ."

As these beautiful lines of Jayadeva's GEETA GOVINDA reflect, art is a way that man links himself with God and preserves his connection with the eternal Truths of the universe.

The great Odissi dance master Padmabhusan Guru Sri Kelucharan Mohapatra used to say, "First study KSHITI, nature or life. Then capture that feeling in art. Most people see only the thing itself, the KSHITI, earth or effect, not the BHAVA, the cause, the Creator Himself."

In GEETA Sri Krishna said, "I am the beauty of beautiful things. Whatever is beautiful comes forth out of a fragment of My splendor."

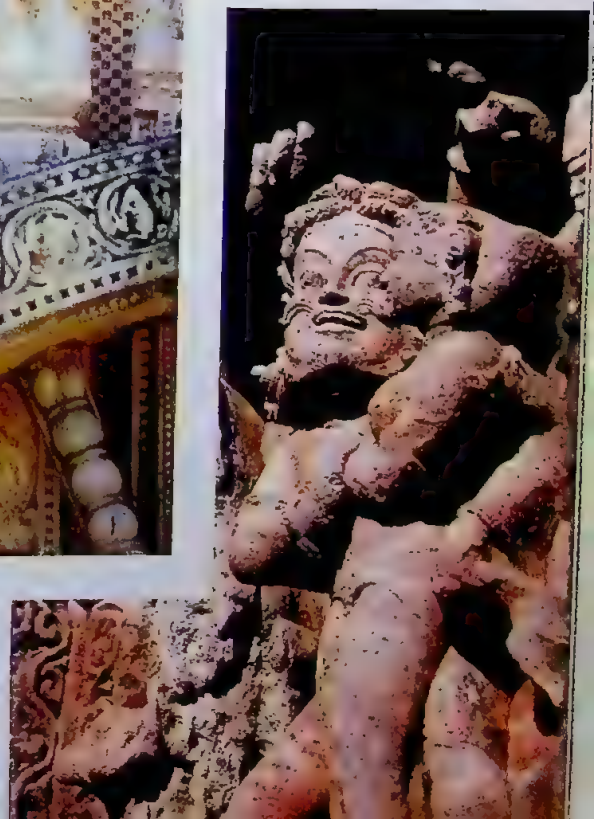
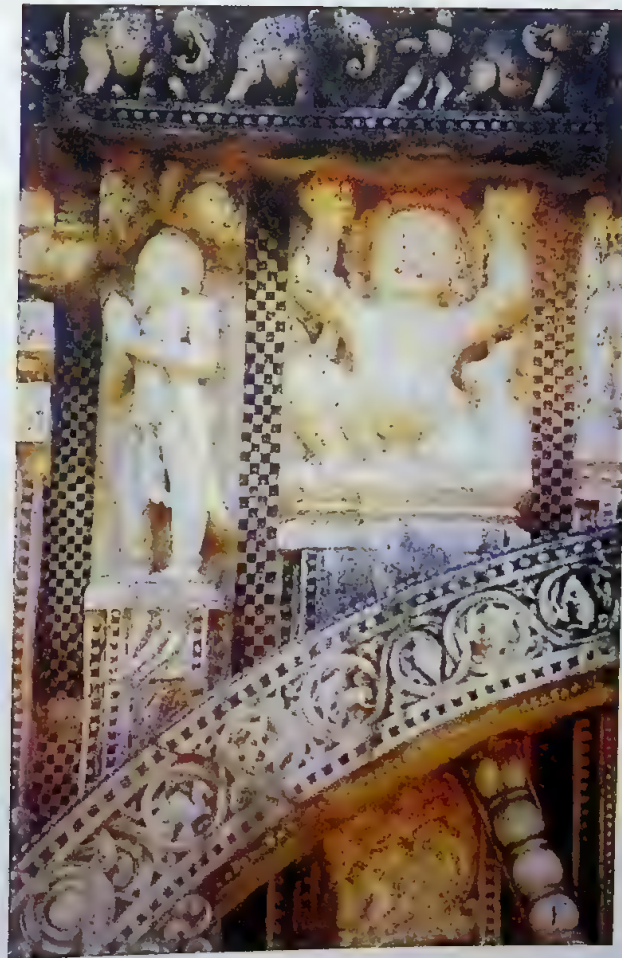
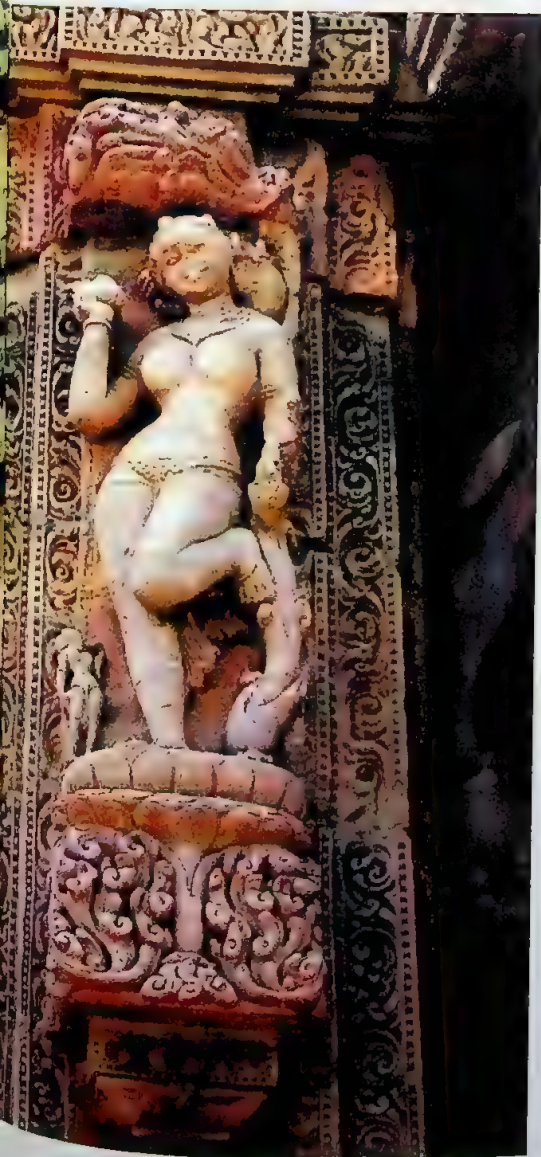
Perhaps the hallmark of all Orissan art is this great attention given to BHAVA, or feeling, especially on the faces. Like a mirror, or DARPANA,

*Opposite: One of the Seven Wonders of the World, the Sun Temple at Konark was said to lift off the ground in the early morning hours due to electromagnetic fields created by the architects.*











Preceding pages: *Sculpture from Orissa's famous temples of Konark, Rajarani, and Mukteswar celebrate all the stages of life, from love and warfare to devotion to God.*

this BHAVA reflects the unseen face of the Maker and His hidden intention.

Nothing is really inanimate. Thus art reflects the true character of a culture. Thought forms become life forms, or in this case, art forms.

The great Sun Temple of Konark, built in the 13th century A.D., is one of the Seven Wonders of the World. More than a glorious feat of architecture, it is sculpture on a grand scale and a monument to inner vision.

Twelve hundred stone carvers worked daily for twelve years to complete it. Every inch of the exterior walls of the temple is alive with all the images of life and nature. Like the wheel of time of ancient Hindu and Buddhist scriptures, you find the entire life of man carved here.

As the wheel moves, man passes through all the stages of life, from youth to love and warfare, and finally to devotion to God. These sculptors who were our predecessors have carved an immortal poem in stone. As figures of devas meditate on coiled snakes, all forms of life emerge.

In the words of the great poet laureate of Bengal, Rabindranath Tagore, "the language of man stands defeated here by the language of stone." Through the seafaring trade of the early Orissan period, its influence has made itself felt in the temple ornamentation of both Java and Cambodia also.

It is said that the 24 wheels of the Sun Temple actually lifted off the ground at certain times of the day, the whole temple levitating in the misty fog of early morning for a few brief moments. Inside each wheel was an iron plate and on all four sides of the temple grounds were huge

electromagnets. The ancients had knowledge of the power of electromagnetic fields centuries before modern scientists "rediscovered" it.

The sculpture of Konark Temple continues to inspire artists, sculptors, and dancers alike. Stone carving in Orissa is still a vibrant living art form today. To enter the home of master craftsman Padmashree Sudarshan Sahoo is to enter the grounds of a living temple.

In his own words, Sudarshan Sahoo says, "We are making another Konark here today! Although nothing can be carved on the huge scale of the Sun Temple, the students in this school are improving the quality of the work. While Konark figures were carved in red sandstone, we can use a variety of stones and stone quality to give much greater detail and fine polish."

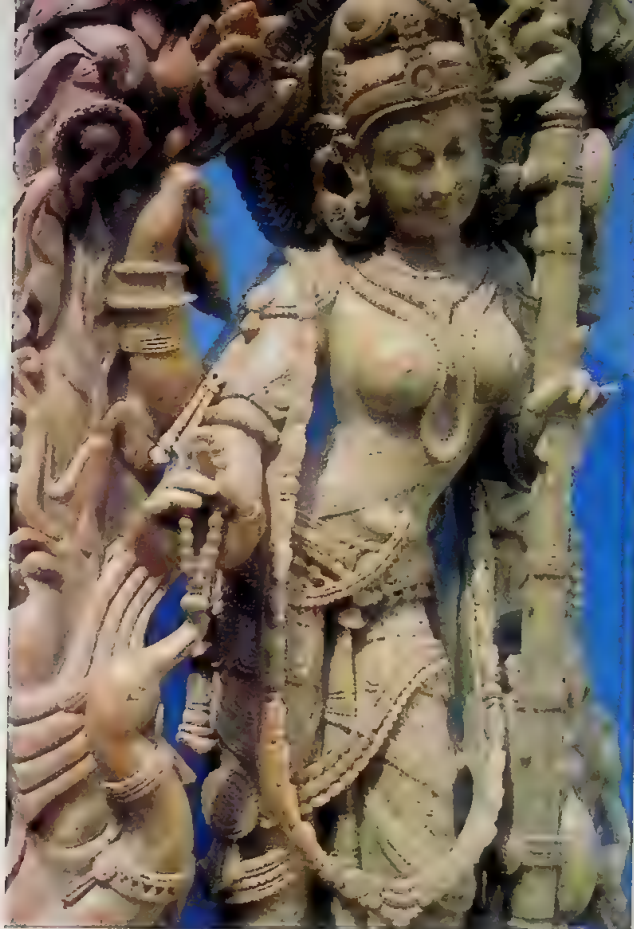
According to the ancient Sanskrit text on sculpture, SILPA SHASTRA, the very purpose of art is to arouse the divinity in man. For this, figures must be in perfect form and give a sense of spiritual upliftment.

The first and even today the main subject for art in Orissa is gods and goddesses. The sculptural quality of all the great Odissi dance choreography of Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra results from his study of figures on Konark Temple's dancing hall, called NATYA MANDAP.

Actually as a young Gotipua dancer in the traditional art village of Raghurajpur, he meditated and had a vision of these beautiful poses, called BHANGIS. Only after visiting Konark Temple a few years later did he realize that his inner visions were that of the carved dancing girls of Konark Temple itself!

They became the perfect forms of CHAUK and TRIBANGI which his dancers were trained to copy. He was fond of saying, "Beauty is in the old figures. The figures of Konark Temple are scientific proof of my art in stone."

It is mainly due to the loving tireless efforts of Padmabhusan Gurus Kelucharan Mohapatra and Pankaj Charan Das that Odissi dance has been



*A winner of the National Award for Art, this image of goddess Saraswati is carved in typically Orissan style, by Lingaraj Maharana, student of Padmashree Guru Sudarshan Sahoo.*

revived and become an internationally recognized art form. Once the sole property of the DEVADASIS, or MAHARIS, inside the temple, it has developed from simple movements and hand gestures to complicated postures and footwork.

In the temple the dance was a necessary ritual at the time of SHODASHA UPACHARANA PUJA, the sixteen step puja performed before the offering of the midday meal. In the evening the DEVADASI sang songs from Jayadeva's GEETA GOVINDA before the deities were put to bed.

So spiritual was this poem that King Prataprudra Deva in the 15th century decreed that only songs from Jayadeva's immortal GEETA GOVINDA could be sung in Jagannath Temple. An inscription to this effect is written above the main door of the temple. The popularity of this sacred song grew even greater.

Even today it is still sung in the temple nightly

by bhajan groups and has become the main item in the Odissi dance repertoire. Songs from GEETA GOVINDA are often performed as ABHINAYA in an Odissi dance program.

MANGALA CHARANA begins an Odissi dance recital, in which the dancer offers her dance to God, in the form of mother Devi, or Lord Jagannath, Sri Krishna, or any other god or goddess. It includes a prayer to that particular deity.

Flowers are then scattered in offering. As Odissi was originally performed by DEVADASIS as a ritual in the temple, it is still permeated with the mood of devotion.

MANGALA CHARANA is followed by a pure dance item, called BATU NRITYA. This set piece includes a series of sculpturesque poses representing the divine musicians seen on the parapets of Konark Temple. An Odissi program is





*Acclaimed in the West as the Nijinski of Indian classical dance, Padmabhusan Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra here dances the roles of both Radha and Krishna in an Ashtapadi from GEETA GOVINDA.*

strung together like a garland of many-colored flowers.

The next item is called PALLAVI, which is a pure dance number set to a special raga. As PALLAVI means "to elaborate," it elaborates the beauty of that particular raga, both musically and visually like a flower blossoming.

Then comes an ABHINAYA piece, often an ASHTAPADI from Jayadeva's GEETA GOVINDA, in which a song is interpreted in expressive movements and hand gestures. The last item is usually MOKSHA, a pure dance performed at fast tempo. In MOKSHA the dancer is said to forget herself fully and experience release from worldly bonds. This is the climax, or "the fruit" of the dance program for both dancer and audience alike.

Whereas Odissi dancers may be men or women, Gotipuas are only young boys dressed as ladies. They themselves sing the love songs of Radha and Krishna while they dance. Today the tradition of Gotipua training is still strong in the art village of Raghurajpur outside Puri where Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra grew up and first studied.

Gotipua troupes of the Dasabhuja Gotipua School there, under the guidance of Guru Maguni Das, still perform at religious festivals like CHANDAN YATRA and JHULAN YATRA as well as travel extensively throughout India and abroad. They are famed for the presentation of the rare and acrobatically very difficult physical exercises set to dance, called BANDHA NRUTYA, numbering ten or more. Gotipua dance is in Odissi style and after the age of 18 or so, many become Odissi dancers or Gotipua gurus.

Folk dance forms, such as MAYURBHANJ CHHAU and SAMBALPURI dance, also contribute to the colorful dance festivals in Orissa, such as those held at Konark Temple twice a year (in

February and December) and at the annual Sea Beach Festival in Puri (in November).

Derived from the Sanskrit word, CHHAYA meaning "mask," and the local Oriya word meaning "to hunt stealthily," CHHAU is usually danced only by men. A warrior dance, it now includes fighting episodes from RAMAYANA, MAHABHARAT, and the PURANAS and is full of masculine vitality.

SAREIKALA CHHAU uses masks whereas MAYURBHANJ CHHAU does not. Both involve beautiful intricate movements of the upper body torso, fantastic jumps and leaps, and take the utmost care in expressing feelings, be it anger, love, fear, laughter, heroism, wonder, or sorrow.

There is a saying in Orissa that "even the trees of Orissa sing and dance." One is reminded of this when the RAJASANKRANTI Festival is celebrated throughout Orissa in early June. On this festive occasion, young girls sit on swings hung from trees, called DOLI, and sing special swing songs, called DOLI-GEETA. Music and dance is found everywhere.

The word Orissa is a British rendering of ODISSA, which is derived from the old Sanskrit name UDRA, meaning "that place where the highest culture, or best things are found." Another very old name for this province is UTKALA. UT means "best," and KALA means "art."

Called UTKRUSTA KALA, Orissa has been described as "an ancient cradle of the arts" and remains unusually rich and unique in the realm of art and culture today, in spite of countless invasions. India without Orissa would be like Greece without Athens or Italy without Rome.

As the culture of South India reverberates with Saivism (worship of Lord Shiva), and North India with tinges of Muslim influence, Orissa abounds with Vaishnavism (worship of Lord Krishna).

Traditional Odissi music, like Odissi dance, developed as part of the temple rituals to Lord











Jagannath in Puri. It is due mainly to the cultivation of this temple music in the JAGA-AKHADAS of Puri town and the Brahmin Sasana villages of Puri district that it remains alive and vital today.

The great devotee musician of the recent past, Singhari Shyama Sundara Kar, himself learned these songs in jagagharas and taught them to so many of the now renowned singers of Orissa, such as Balakrishna Das, Bhikari Bala, and Srimati Bhubaneswari Mishra.

Shyama Sundara Kar was my uncle on my mother's side through marriage. Not realizing his greatness as a small boy, I used to ask him to sing me a song, which he kindly did. Once in his youth he actually went mad; so engrossed in music he was, he forgot wife and children for a while.

Later in life he used to say, "Unless one is mad after music, one can't go deeply into its contents." Poor students he taught without charge and some even stayed in his house.

Although a devout musician, he never forgot Lord Jagannath. As a Singhari worshipper in the temple, his duty was to dress the deities himself every morning. He said on his deathbed, "Whatever I have done in music is due totally to the blessings of Lord Jagannath."

Modern music meant he would close his ears and never listen. He often made the allegation that those singers who performed classical Odissi in this modern style were only for money and would destroy Odissi music as a distinct art form.

Hindustani classical music gives emphasis to raga, or elaboration and improvisation upon the melody; whereas Karnatak music is dominated by rhythm, or tala. In Odissi music the influence of Bhakti Rasa is of paramount importance.

Actually Odissi music is older than either Hindustani or Karnatic music. The ancient style, or SAILYEE, of Odissi is UDRA MAGHADHI form. The immortal poets of Orissa, such as Jayadeva, Gopala Krishna, Banamali, and Kavisurjya, stated categorically the exact ragas, tala, and laya in which their songs were to be sung. These

were completely different from North and South Indian ragas.

Unfortunately with the passing of time and change of taste of the listeners, Odissi music has lost much of its original purity. Even the style of musical embellishments or GAMAKAS, is unique. They are of three types in pure Odissi style:

1. **ANDOLITA** - swaying
2. **ULLASITA** - rolling
3. **KURALA** - round-like, said to be depicting the round eyes of Lord Jagannath.

This style of ornamentation of notes gives Odissi music its great softness, lyricism, and charm. Today the above-mentioned singers and music gurus, such as Dr. Damodhar Hota, are fighting hard to preserve this luminous fire of pure Odissi music so that it not be extinguished but preserved for all to treasure and draw inspiration from.

Blending both music and dance into its powerful storytelling, PALA is one of the most distinctive theater forms of Orissa. Its origins go back to the Muslim-Mughal period of the 16th century. Emperor Akbar started a cultural exchange between Hindu and Muslim practices.

*Preceding pages: In a dance of invocation, a Mayurbhanj Chhau dancer portrays Lord Shiva while other dancers use masks in a Sareikala Chhau drama. Folk dancers from Sambalpur perform a women's line dance and Padmashree artist Madhavi Mudgal and her Odissi dance troupe from Delhi conclude an exciting Konark Dance Festival. (Left and top right) Artist Aruna Mohanty and other dancers of Guru Gangadhar Pradhan's Dance Academy enact a poetic tribute to the dancing figures of Konark Temple in pure Odissi style.*





*This exquisite PATTACHITRA painting by Raghurajpur artist Kalucharan Barik shows Radha and Krishna seated inside a GOPI RATH. Rath, a car made up of the bodies of gopis. All the detailed work is done with a very tiny brush made from a mouse's tail.*



The God Satyanarayan of Hinduism was assimilated with Pir of Mohammedanism, bringing about a unified form of worship, called SATYAPIR. PALA emerged out of this noble intellectual endeavor. Mansingh, the minister of Akbar, came to Puri and started PALA here. It has since disappeared in Delhi, but flourishes in Puri.

The performers are six in number, one being the lead singer, called GAYAKA, and one the drummer. Others, known as PALIA, are side singers who play big cymbals and interpret the verses for the listeners. After an invocation to Lord Satyanarayan, the PALA groups tell stories from the PURANAS, SANHITAS, and the great epics of India. PALA is a great reservoir of the old culture and traditions of ancient India.

As a boy I used to sit for PALA throughout the whole night. As the GAYAKA knew many things, one could learn much. Even today PALA performances at DOLA BEDI during HOLI Festival in the spring last the whole night. Different groups compete in scholarship and skill of storytelling.

A GAYAKA knows by heart hundreds of lines from the epics, songs, Sanskrit slokas, and funny jokes as well. Wearing colorful dress, the PALA parties are also musicians and actors.

Spontaneously, the GAYAKA sings and recites. Members of the audience put difficult questions on the epics and expect erudite but easily understood and appealing answers.

I myself have put questions, such as "Why did Rama go to the forest for 14 years? or Has the sun ever risen at night?" Once I asked, "Why does Ravana have ten heads?" The GAYAKA must respond quickly, often by quoting slokas or singing songs. Once I heard the beauty of the dawn described for six hours, the GAYAKA quoting lines from more than twenty books of Oriya poetry. The beauty of a lady was once detailed for two nights straight.

Due to the invasion of television, PALA is becoming a rare vanishing art. But as Puri is the seat of ancient traditions, it is still alive and

popular here.

If a baby in the worshipper community is sick, the family prays to Lord Satyanarayan to heal it, making a BRATA, or vow, called SATYANARAYAN BRATA. If the baby is cured, they will invite a PALA party to perform in the house in celebration and praise to Lord Satyanarayan. They also perform during all the big festivals of Puri, not only HOLI, but also RATH YATRA in late June and JHULAN YATRA in August as well.

Annapurna Theater, the mother theater of Orissa, was founded by Somanath Das in 1933. It was unique in the annals of theater history because for more than fifty years it performed nightly, 365 days of the year throughout the cities and villages of Orissa. Many famous film and T.V. actors and dancers today had their beginnings here.

Annapurna Theater was theater in the classic tradition, performing dramas from epics and classic Oriya works as well. It gave a start to many of the dramatists and writers who are famous today.

The art village of Raghurajpur not far from Puri is the home of many traditional artisans of Orissa. Not only Gotipua dancers train there, but more than fifty families of hereditary CHITRAKARAS, or traditional painters, live and work there.

PATTA CHITRA is the name for traditional painting in Orissa. PATTA means "cloth," which they stiffen with tamarind glue and chalk powder to form their canvas. They used to make their own natural colors from herbs and shells also.

*Opposite Clockwise: PATTA CHITRA artist Kalucharan Barik teaches his small son this art. Another Raghurajpur artist makes a papier mache elephant head for a local festival while little children play with masks. Ladies use artistic GANJAPA playing cards for village games.*









These paintings generally depict well-known episodes from Hindu stories of Lord Krishna, the more popular ones incorporating the three deities of Jagannath, Balabhadra, and Subhadra. Palm leaf etchings are also done with an iron stylus, called LEKHANI.

The basic brush of the highly detailed PATTA CHITRA work is a very fine stiff brush made from a mouse's tail. Almost ninety per cent of a PATTA CHITRA painting is done with this brush, even large works which take months to complete.

It is interesting to note that whereas most of the great architectural work has stopped in Orissa, painting is on the rise; some painters doing modern western style oil paintings as well. Even playing cards, called GANJAPA, are painted in classical PATTA style and have become an art form in themselves. Different districts of Orissa are famous for different themes on their cards. Raghurajpur is famous for its DASAVATARA cards.

The three wooden deities of Jagannath Temple, Jagannath, Balabhadra, and Subhadra, are themselves painted in PATTA CHITRA style. Layers of cloth are pasted over the carved wood and the same natural colors are used.

It is the duty of CHITRAKARA sevakas to retouch the faces when necessary. Once a year after the special bath ceremony, called SNANA PURNIMA, they are totally repainted. During this painting period, the deities are hidden from public view.

Not only music, dance, and painting, but also most of the handicrafts of Orissa owe their existence today to their intimate relationship with Puri Temple and its rituals.

Puri is perhaps the only town where there are ancient settlements exclusively for artisans of different crafts, such as Pathuria Sahi for stonecarvers, Chitrakara Sahi for painters, Matimandapa Sahi for clay pot makers whose clay pots are used for MAHAPRASAD, and Kundheibenta Sahi for wooden toy makers.

Brass works are sold for worship, especially high quality GHANTAS, or puja cymbals, and elaborately engraved thalis, or plates for offering food to the deities. Not only wooden toys, but idols and chariot decorations are carved every year for RATH YATRA by Puri's numerous MAHARANAS, or wood carvers.

APPLIQUE work covers the chariots with a colorful canopy. Patches of colored fabric in various shapes and designs are stitched over a basic fabric. This craft has a living and very active tradition in the town of Pipli on the road to Puri. The streets are lined with colorful APPLIQUE displays of umbrellas, wall hangings, bed covers, and "CHANDUA" canopies.

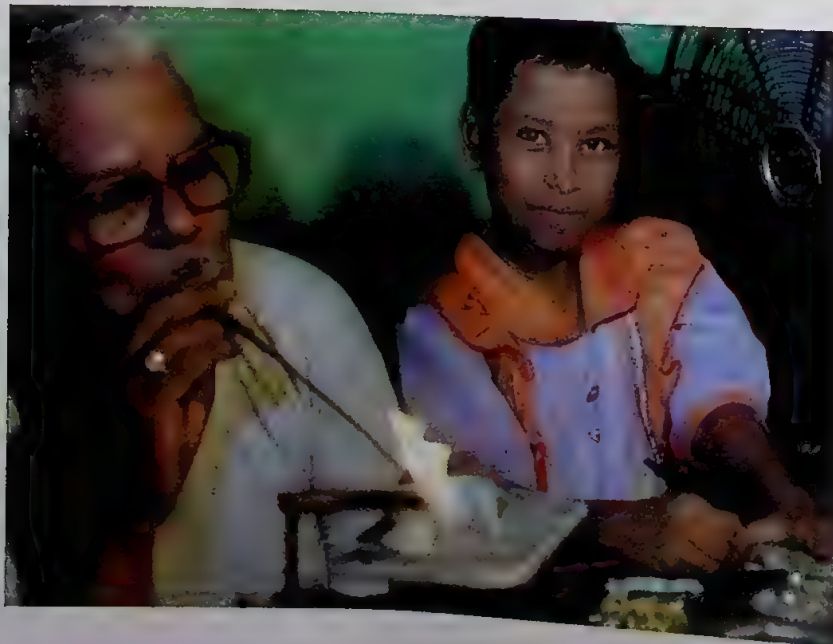
Weavers of Sambalpur District design not only saris for ladies in unique Odissi motifs, but also costly silk PATAS for the deities. These are usually worn for the last VESHA, or dress, of the day, called BADASINGHAR VESHA, as it is felt to be the most beautiful decoration.

Sari motifs reflect the rich legacy of Odissi culture. Images woven like the fish, elephant, lion, deer, lotus, conch, and creepers, are similar to ones carved on the stone walls of Orissan temples. Traditionally, Odissi dancers are expected only to wear Odissi saris.

Even the handwoven cloth helps to preserve the rich cultural heritage. A classic example is the famous GEETA GOVINDA KHANDUA, a pata woven especially for offering to Lord Jagannath. These fabrics are woven in bright colors with

*Opposite:* A sari weaver from Sambalpur demonstrates her art at the annual Konark Craft Exhibition. Applique designs and brass work are also on display.





excerpts from GEETA GOVINDA on them.

For all the gods and goddesses of local temples, gold and silver jewelry is given. The art of silver filigree, locally called TARAKASI, has become one of the finest in the world. Silver in Orissa has high purity, often exceeding ninety per cent.

The filigree process consists of drawing silver through a series of consecutively smaller holes to produce fine strands of wire. These wires are then made into various shapes and soldered.

Necklaces, ear pendants, anklets, bangles, and crowns are made not only for ladies on their marriage day, or Odissi dancers, but for temple deities also. A child's first solid food, usually a dish of sweet rice, called KHEERA, is served in a special silver bowl.

As one-fourth the population of Orissa is still tribal, numerous forms of folk art are found in every district, especially TERRACOTTA figures, and animals and human heads made of DHOKRA metal casting. The deft hands of craftsmen breathe life and beauty into inanimate materials, be it stone, wood, or metal.

One of the most unique art forms of Orissa is SOLA and JARI KAMA. It is one of the original art forms used in Jagannath Temple to decorate the deities. A soft, spongy reed, SOLA grows in ponds and marshy places all over Orissa. Like paper, it must be carved out and rolled, then tightly tied with a thread. Out of this roll of SOLA "paper," an infinite number of flowers, animals, and figures can be carved.

In the hands of a master craftsman like

Baidyanath Khuntia, anything is possible. At the age of 21, he was the youngest person in India ever to receive the National Award for Art. He made an exact replica of one of the 24 wheels of Konark Temple.

Every inch is alive with SOLA figures. When asked why he selected the wheel, he replied, "For its great beauty and Orissan style and feeling. It is full of all the images of life and took me one year to complete."

Many NAYIKAS, or ladies waiting for their beloved Lord Krishna, are carved in various poses, decorating themselves in a mirror, or simply waiting. A peacock, many flowers and creepers, a king's elephant, a deer, a monkey eating a banana, every inch of the wheel is decorated in the poetry of delicate SOLA carving.

Baidyanath Khuntia has carved Lord Jagannath in all His VESHAS, or dresses, from the lovely LOTUS VESHA to the rare NAGA VESHA, or warrior dress. For Durga Puja in Puri every year, he and other SOLA artists make huge crowns in SOLA and JARI KAMA for the mother Durgas of the various neighborhood SAHIS.

JARI means "shiny," and shiny decorations such as sequins, called JHUMKIES, are pasted on the SOLA frame. In olden days these JARI decorations for images of mother Durga were in actual gold and silver. Real gold thread was woven into the silk sari borders and pure gold and silver earrings were worn by the deity.

The cost of gold now makes such work impossible. For marriages small crowns in SOLA and JARI are made for bride and groom.

One of the biggest SOLA displays is during JHULAN YATRA, the Festival of Swings every August. Huge swings of more than two storeys in height are covered with SOLA and JARI work in many mathas and in Jagannath Temple itself. The deities of Radha and Krishna are seated on the swing and pulled slowly to the sweet sounds of devotional music.

No wonder the art of Orissa has attracted and

*Opposite: Famed silversmiths of Madan Mohan Das & Sons, Cuttack make crowns for deities as well as dance and wedding jewelry.*







*Above: Sola reeds come not only in white but also marble color, like the above carving of a dancing Lord Ganesh.*

*Opposite: Youngest artist in India ever to receive the National Award for Art, master craftsman Baidyanath Khuntia creates infinite images out of the ancient art of SOLA KAMA.*

captivated people from all over the world for centuries. It has been said that if you know Orissa, you know India. This is especially true of all Orissan art.

Inseparable from God and life in the temple, all forms of art in Orissa have become treasure houses of Orissa's rich past and torchbearers to India's bright future.







## PURI IN THE 21ST CENTURY

"No caste, no creed, I consider myself Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Jew, Buddhist, and Confucian. What binds us together is more important than what pulls us apart."

So said Gandhi, standing at the main gate of Jagannath Temple, Puri

When Mahatma Gandhi came to Puri in 1938 on his Salt March to the South, he took three things from Orissa with him, his half-dhoti dress, a schoolboy's broken pencil, and his walking stick.

His half-dhoti dress he had already adopted, after meeting with Gopabandhu in Sakhigopal in 1921 and seeing the poverty of the women and children there.

The schoolboy's pencil was a small boy's donation to the Salt March. It was all that the boy had, but he wished the Mahatma to have it. Since that day Gandhi was in the habit of writing and signing all important documents only with that broken pencil.

The walking stick was presented to Gandhi by the people of Puri District. A lathi stick for self-defense, it had been used in the first uprising against the British in Orissa in 1870. As Gandhi was an old man at the time of the Salt March, he needed a cane. He used to call it fondly his "third leg." It was later written in English newspapers that Gandhi defeated the whole British Empire with a lathi stick!



Opposite: With Daitapatis and temple worshippers on board, Lord Jagannath triumphantly arrives at Gundicha Temple in His chariot called NANDI GHOSHA, meaning "Infinite Bliss."





*To see the great Car Festival of Puri, people sit on all the rooftops of Grand Road and hang from signboards even!*

At the time of Gandhi's visit to Puri, untouchables were still not allowed to enter Jagannath Temple. So Gandhi himself refused to enter and together they stood outside Lion's Gate, taking the blessings of Lord Jagannath from there. Only in 1955, seven years after Gandhi's death, were people of lower caste admitted into the temple.

The great unity of spirit that both Lord Jagannath and Gandhi embodied was not realized in his lifetime. Perhaps it remains for people of the 21st century to see the fulfillment of this dream, as non-Hindus are still not allowed inside the temple.

In the words of the famous historian, William Hunter, the worship of Lord Jagannath at Puri aims at a unity which embraces every form of worship and every conception of God.

According to ancient prophecies, Puri will assume this great role in the near future. In BRAHMA PURANA it is written that as Rama was for Tretya Yuga and Sri Krishna was for Dwapara Yuga, Lord Jagannath is the presiding deity for this modern age of Kali Yuga.

"SATYA JUGE NRISINGHASYA  
PUJABIDHI,  
TRETAYA RAMACHANDRASYA,  
DWPARE KRUSHNASYA,  
KALIJUGE SRI JAGANNATH."

"In Satya Yuga, people worshipped  
Nrisingha,  
In Tretya Yuga, Sri Rama,  
In Dwapara Yuga, Sri Krishna,  
Likewise in Kali Yuga,  
It is Lord Jagannath."

In DASA KUMAR CHARIT, written by Bishnu Sharma in the 14th century, it is said,

"BRAHMANDA CHHATRADANDA,  
SATADHRUTI BHABANA,  
AMBHARUHA NALADANDA,  
KSHANINAU KUPADANDA,  
JYOTICHAKRAKSHADANDA,  
JAGANNATHA BIBIDHA KLESANI  
KALADANDA."

"If the whole world is an umbrella,  
 Jagannath Temple is the stick,  
 If the whole world is a lotus,  
 This temple is the reed,  
 If the whole world is a boat,  
 It is the oar,  
 If the whole cosmos is in motion,  
 This temple is the sun around which the planets  
 revolve,  
 If one's whole life is full of difficulties,  
 Jagannath Temple is the lathi stick  
 Which drives them away!"

In DEVI BHAGAVATA, one of the main scriptures in Tantric Buddhism, Lord Jagannath is described as Bhairaba Shiva Himself, the most auspicious God in Tantra, and Puri is known as Tantra Puri.

"UTKALE NABIDESASTHU,  
 BIRAJA KSHETRA SUTTAMANI,  
 BIMALA SA MAHADEVI,  
 JAGANNATHAYASTHU BHAIRABA!"

"Utkal (the old name of Orissa),  
 Is in the navel of mother India,  
 Where Bimala is the great goddess,  
 And Lord Jagannath is BHAIRABA  
 Himself."

In BIMALA TANTRA it is stated that only in Puri, or Purusottama Pitha, can one get all four kinds of liberation together, that is, DHARMA, ARTHA, KAMA, and MOKSHA.

"JOGAMAYA JOGARUPA PURUSOTTAMA  
 BALLABA,  
 PADA PITHESWARI VIDYA CHATUBARGA  
 PRADAYINI."

"One who will remain in Purusottama  
 Kshetra (Puri),  
 Will get all four kinds of liberation at once!"

In BAMADEVA SANHITA, one of the five palm leaf scripts where rituals of Jagannath Temple are given, it is stated,

"KADABABYASTAMA DINE,  
 JE CHA PASYANTI MRUTYUBAH."

"If the festivals, rituals, and leelas  
 of Lord Jagannath  
 Are seen and witnessed,  
 One gets liberation  
 From this worldly cycle  
 of birth and death."

As to why one gets liberation here, the poet saint Tulsidas, writer of the Hindi Ramayana, said after visiting Puri,

"BINUPADI CHALAI SUNAI PINUKANA,  
 KARABINU KARAN KARAI BIDHI NANA."

"He has no feet, but walks,  
 He has no ears, but hears.  
 He has no eyes, but sees.  
 Only he who is that force  
 Can have so many festivals.  
 People, having complete form,  
 Can never do this,  
 But having no organs,  
 He does everything."

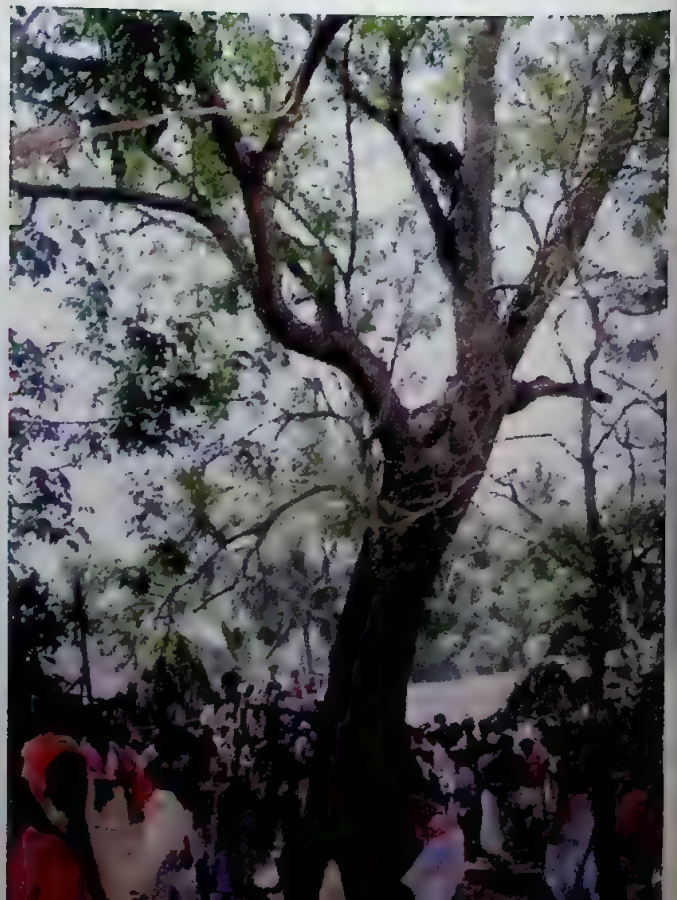
After having darshan of Lord Jagannath in Puri, the great Muslim poet Kabir sang in one of his songs,

"THAKUR BALE BIRAJO JEE."

"You remain here happily,  
 Oh Lord,  
 So that many can have the chance  
 To come and see You!"

As for the food one eats in Jagannath Temple,











Preceding Pages: *NABAKALEBAR Festival, as it was in 1996. Temple flags lead the procession as the wood, or DARU, for the new Jagannath reaches the temple. The neem tree chosen is considered holy and puja is done to it before it is cut. A cart brings the wood for SUDARSHAN deity along a village road to Puri. A NAGA dancer and Daitapati brothers celebrate the return after a month-long search. A descendent of the tribal chief Biswabasu who first worshipped NILA MADHAVA sits in the front of the DARU cart.*

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much has been written about its uniqueness and its power. In BRAHMANDA PURANA, it tells,

"JAGANNATHASYA NAIVIDYA,  
NASTI SANSPASTABUSANAM."

"Eating MAHAPRASAD of Lord Jagannath  
Grants liberation,  
This kind of holy food  
One cannot get anywhere else!"

In PADMA PURANA, it describes the kind of happiness one gets in taking MAHAPRASAD,

"TATRANNA PACHIKA LAKSHMI,  
SWAYAM VOKTA JANARDANA."

"MAHAPRASAD cooked  
By mother Lakshmi,  
And eaten by Lord Jagannath Himself,  
If given to an ordinary man,  
What more can he want?"

Another sloka, from JAGANNATH ASTAKA, tells of the happiness one gets in having darshan of Lord Jagannath,

"SANSAR PATA AVAYA MATULA,  
SUKATARA CHORDHA BAHU  
SARANYAMA,  
TAMDWE NILADRINATHA PRAKATITEA,  
PURUSHA SRI JAGANNATHA DEVA."

"Seeing Lord Jagannath here on the  
Blue Mountain,

Raising His arms in welcome,  
One gets the happiest moment of his life."

Like all slokas from the VEDAS, UPANISHADS, and PURANAS, these slokas cannot be verified from other books or historical sources. They are rather the source material out of which many books have been written. They have come to us from actual seers and sages who have come to Puri and had this experience here.

As spiritual insights, they are called PRAGNA PRATIBHA, that which is created out of nothing. Rather than imaginary stories, they are ever alive in the spiritual truths that they reveal about Puri as a place and Lord Jagannath as a form of God.

According to Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba of Puttaparti in Andhra Pradesh, history is not in its true reality the simple recording of the lives of kings, their battles and so-called accomplishments. In its truest perspective, history is all "His story." What is divinely ordained, will happen. People and events are like chessmen on a chessboard.

As life in Orissa has always revolved around God, it is not surprising that God has chosen to manifest here in such a grand way. Throughout her turbulent history, Orissa has served as a crossroads between North and South India. This has not only served to enrich her culture, but also to expand her consciousness as well.

It is well-documented from historical sources that Buddhism had a strong foothold in Orissa from the pre-Christian era. After the conquest of Kalinga (Orissa) by Emperor Ashoka in 261 B.C., Buddhism must have gotten an extra impetus under his royal patronage. The absence of caste distinction in partaking MAHAPRASAD, the Car Festival, and the Bath Festival of SNANA PURNIMA all have Buddhist influences.

According to BHABISYA PURANA, Jesus spent one year in Puri before returning to Jerusalem to begin his mission there.

In the course of his spiritual conquest of the country, Adishankar (788-820 A.D.) visited Orissa



*New charioteers are carved for the Raths every year. As all temple duties, the carving of the wooden deities is hereditary and passed down from father to son.*

and made Puri the eastern DHAMA of Hinduism. From this time onwards Puri has continued to rise in importance as a great center of Hindu pilgrimage.

In the 12th century A.D., the enlightened ruler Chodaganga Deva founded the Ganga Dynasty in Orissa and started the reconstruction of the present magnificent temple of Lord Jagannath. He and his descendants completed this stupendous task and incorporated into the worship all three major aspects of Hinduism.

Broadminded as they were, they installed not a single image of NILA MADHAVA, or PURUSOTTAMA, but the TRINITY: Balabhadra, representing SAIVISM and Shiva, the principle of dissolution in the universe; Subhadra, for SHAKTISM, or Brahma, the principle of creation; and Lord Jagannath, or Vishnu for Vaishnavism. Since this time Puri has become the undisputed center of all spiritual faiths in India.

From the historical perspective, events such as continual Muslim invasions may have "forced" the

Ganga kings to absorb alien spiritual traditions into the temple. According to eminent historian, Dr. Satyanarayan Rajguru, the earlier stone images of NILA MADHAVA (a dark blue stone figure possessing four arms holding SANKHA, or conch, CHAKRA, or spinning discus, GADA, or club, and PADMA, or lotus) and PURUSOTTAMA may have been changed at about this time to wood.

In the early 1300's (about 1306 A.D.), the Ganga king Narasimhadeva may have enlisted the support of tribal Savaras, especially Jara-Savaras of Gajapati District in South Orissa, in defending the great temple. In exchange they were promised that the three deities would now be made of Neem wood and in the shape of their tribal God, whom they called "JAGA."

In temple inscriptions, the name JAGANNATH, meaning "Lord of the universe," became more popular than PURUSOTTAMA after the installation of the new wooden images in the great temple.





*Thousands of Rajasthani villagers make a pilgrimage to Puri every January to offer their first rice crop to Lord Jagannath and take bath in the sea on MAKARA SANKRANTI.*

This wooden Jagannath was worshipped by all sections of the people, none the less the God of Hindu Brahmins than the God of tribal Savaras, the Buddhists, and Jains alike. All the Ganga kings and later the Gajapati kings were devoted worshippers of the Lord in the present wooden form, called DARU BRAHMA.

Thus from the very day of installation, this wooden Jagannath has been worshipped, not as a sectarian deity, but as the PURNA BRAHMA Himself.

What is the age of Jagannath? What is the culture of Jagannath? What is the race and religion of Jagannath? What is the rope that pulls the chariot of Jagannath? All of these questions that scholars and historians continually debate can truly be answered only by understanding who this Lord Jagannath really is.

Quoting a realized seer of KENA UPANISHAD, the present king of Puri, GAJAPATI MAHARAJA DIBYASINGHA DEVA, said on the occasion of

NABAKALEBAR YATRA in 1996.

"JASWAMATA TASWA MATA,  
MATA JASWA NA VEDA SA."

Kena Upanishad II - 3

"It is the Unknown to the master of true knowledge,  
But to the ignorant It is the known."

"He understands IT  
Who comprehends IT not;  
And he understands IT not,  
Who feels he has comprehended IT."

The Raja continues, "It is only in the realm of pure BHAKTI, or devotion, and complete surrender at the Lotus Feet of the Lord of the universe that the real fruits of man's search can be found and the immeasurable, infinite, eternal Glory of

the supreme Lord and His divine Leela in this world realized.”

According to BRAHMA SANHITA, Lord Jagannath of Puri is said to embody all twelve types of BRAHMA.

### 1. **BRAHMA** - LIFE FORCE.

The Sanskrit word BRAHMA means “can move but cannot be moved.” As such it is the life force in all, uniting all. During NABAKALEBAR YATRA every 12 to 16 years, this most sacred BRAHMA is taken from the hollow navel cavity of the old deity and placed in the new.

Called BRAHMA PADARTHA, it is one of the most sacred, unique, and mystic rituals not only of Jagannath Temple, but of all of India. In no other Hindu temple is such a ceremony observed, nor has it ever been recorded.

Inside the navel cavity of the deities is kept a SALAGRAMA-SILA, the sacred stone of Hinduism that actually grows in length inch by inch every year. Some say that a tooth relic from the Buddha was also put there.

When this exchange of BRAHMA is made in the dead of night, about one month before RATH YATRA, in NABAKALEBAR years, the head Daitapatis are blindfolded and their hands tied with used pieces of Jagannath’s own cloth.

This thickly covered mysterious object, called BRAHMA, feels, in their own words, “like a rabbit jumping.”

This concept of NABAKALEBAR YATRA, or taking on of a new body, was eloquently expressed in BHAGAVAT GEETA as follows:

“VASAAMSI JIRNANI YATHA VIHAYA,  
NAVANI GIRHNATI NARO PARANI,  
TATHA SARIRANI VIHAYA JIRNANI,  
ANYANI JAMYATI NAVANI DEHI.”

“Just as a person casts off worn-out  
garments

And puts on others that are new,  
Even so does the embodied soul

Cast off worn-out bodies  
And take on new ones.”

Bhagavat Geeta, 2-22

Thus Puri has become known as the city of the great Transformation every twelve to sixteen years. The only other spiritual festival of India that draws more people is the KUMBHA MELA at Prayag once every twelve years. For both of these astounding events, millions of pilgrims come.

### 2. **PARAMA BRAHMA** - the SUPREME BRAHMA.

Lord Jagannath in His black color is that eternal energetic source of creation out of which all forms and all individual Brahmas emerge. As formless Brahma, He is AKSHAYA, “the imperishable, beyond birth and death,” and AKSHAYA, “the whole universe itself.” The entire universe is pervaded by Him; proceeds from Him, rests in Him, and finally dissolves into Him again. As is said in BRAHMA SANHITA,

“EKSADA BIPRA  
BAHUDHA BHABANTI.”

“From one, I have become many!”

In Jagannath Temple more than thirty VESHAS, or special dresses, are given to the deities throughout the year, such as:

1. **SUNA VESHA** - golden dress
2. **PADMA VESHA** - lotus dress
3. **HATI VESHA** - elephant dress
4. **KALIYA DALANA VESHA** - the dress of the boy Sri Krishna dancing on a snake
5. **RAI DAMODARA VESHA** - the dress of Radha giving betel pan to Sri Krishna who is playing the flute
6. **BAMANA VESHA** - the dwarf avatar, BAMANA, who killed the pride of Emperor Bali of Kerala



7. **LAKSHMI-NRISINGHA VESHA** - the half-lion, half-man dress of Nrisingha Avatar
8. **RAJA VESHA** in November - the dress of Sri Krishna with golden ornaments and golden flute, surrounded by gopis
9. **NAGARJUNA VESHA** - the great warrior dress of victory

These special dresses were donated by various devotees out of intense love for one form of God, which they saw manifested in Lord Jagannath. Even throughout the day we see these changes in form within the form in Lord Jagannath

To the Vaishnavite, he looks like a child Gopala on mother Yashoda's lap in the morning, a king with his ministers and attendants in the afternoon, and the most attractive beloved in the last dress of the evening. This strange phenomenon has been best explained in GARGE SANHITA,

"PURNA PURANAH PURUSOTTAMATTAM PARAMESWAR."

"I am full, all the epics in one,  
Yet I surrender to the wish of My devotee,  
And come in whatever form he wishes."

### 3. **AGNI BRAHMA** - BRAHMA as FIRE.

As an Oriya saying tells, "Fire never discriminates." In the process of adjustments throughout its history, Jagannath Temple has assimilated many strange contradictions in spiritual thought. What is amazing is that there is no discarding. Lord Jagannath absorbs everything, all sects and all forms of worship.

All the gods and goddesses attacking and appealing to the people have found a place inside the temple walls. Lord Jagannath has welcomed and embraced all, but has been overwhelmed by none, and has lost Himself in none.

He is Sri Rusav Deva to the Jains, the Tri-Ratna of the Buddhists, Shiva Shakti to the Saivites, and Radha Krishna to the Vaishnavas.

Individual devotees have seen their own most cherished Lord. Tulsidas saw Sri Rama; Kabir saw Allah; Ganapati Bhatta saw the elephant-headed Ganesh.

According to legend, the form of Lord Jagannath first appeared out of a great fire sacrifice, a Nrisingha Yagna. As fire makes no distinction, He also accepts all. God is one; there is no separation; all religions, all people are His.

### 4. **SABDA BRAHMA** - BRAHMA as SACRED SOUND.

The sound OM is the bija mantra, or seed mantra of all life, the primeval sound according to SABDA SANHITA. When the world was under water, this sound was first heard. This sound, symbolized in the sound of the conch, and heard at all puja times in Vishnu temples, has the power to awaken and revive the spirit within us.

Also called NADA BRAHMA JAGANNATH, He awakens this big sound in our heads, like the roaring of the ocean itself. When we have His darshan, we feel this AHUM-ness, AHUM BRAHMA, "I am THAT," like a wave crashing into the ocean again.

### 5. **JNANA BRAHMA** - BRAHMA as KNOWLEDGE, ALL-WISDOM.

Embodying all forms of spiritual thought and worship, Lord Jagannath is all-knowing, omniscient, as His big round eyes suggest. He has the power to grant knowledge, and take it away also.

A great pandit and scholar, Sri Chaitanya often became senseless when he had darshan of Lord Jagannath.

All pride of scholarship, of knowing anything, vanished as his mind became absorbed in pure love of God. Bhaktas tell countless stories of His answering their prayers.

As a headmaster in government service, I was once about to be transferred from Puri to a distant hill station. I went to Lord Jagannath in His chariot. With a tear in my eye, I said to Him silently, "If You want me to go, I will go, but will





*At SNANA PURNIMA once a year Lord Jagannath is dressed in HATI VESHA. This elephant dress represents both Buddhism and Hinduism.*

You not help?" The next day the government order was mysteriously cancelled.

#### **6. PREMA BRAHMA - BRAHMA as LOVE INCARNATE.**

The great link between Sri Krishna of Dwapara Yuga and Lord Jagannath of this present Kali Yuga is the Love, or PREMA, that emanates from them both. It is the same Love that was in Sri Krishna that attracts devotees to Jagannath by the millions.

Although now abstract in form, the upraised all-embracing arms of Lord Jagannath reveal who He really is. He is PREMASWARUPA, Love Incarnate, the essence of all the VEDAS, fully self-contained, yet assuming this shape out of His great Love, His PREMA, for the good of all.

His Love has no other motive than this, and binds all together like the ropes of His chariot, which all can pull together, regardless of caste or creed. Lord Jagannath's five-colored garland, known as BAIJAYANTI MALA, is the same worn by Lord Krishna. The five senses are held by Him as flower arrows in His bow. His only weapon is Love.

#### **7. BYOMA BRAHMA - BRAHMA as ALL-PERVADING SPACE or AKASA.**

As Lord Jagannath is omniscient, all-knowing, and omnipotent in the powers of Love, He is also omnipresent, or all-pervasive. These three qualities are the most significant features of a divine manifestation. Wherever people of Puri go, even to places outside India, they feel like "Jagannath's





*Holder of the national title of YOGA ARJUN, yoga master Jameswar Khuntia demonstrates DHANU ASANA, bow posture, with two of his young students, who also rank as Orissa State Champions.*

big round eyes and black face are behind them.”

A great yogi of the 14th century by the name of Sankar Swami came to Puri from Uttar Pradesh. Ten years earlier, his guru from the Himalayas had promised him a great SIDDHI, or spiritual power, known as TRATAK SIDDHI. If he could look at the sun for twelve hours straight, from sunrise to sunset, he would gain this power. For one month he tried, but his eyes pained too much so he stopped. Then in a dream, his guru told, “Go to Puri, there is TRATAK BRAHMA. There you will find victory.” When the yogi came to Puri, he naturally went to Jagannath Temple also. There he stared at Lord Jagannath for one hour straight, and the siddhi came.

This TRATAK SIDDHI gives man victory over death. Later he was declared dead more than twenty-six times, but got back his life within a few hours. He was cut with swords; he slept on a bed of iron nails while a young man danced on his chest; he was buried for two days underground in

a sealed coffin, but emerged alive.

This Sankar Swami declared that Lord Jagannath’s eyes are the sun and moon and their all-pervading rays gave him this great gift.

#### 8. **SAUNDARJYA BRAHMA** - BRAHMA as BEAUTY INCARNATE.

It is said that when the Lord manifests fully on earth, He does not come alone. He brings with Him all the sixteen arts and wherever He goes, He is surrounded by them. These sixteen arts, or SOLA KALA, are:

1. **DAYA** - Compassion
2. **DHARJYA** - Patience
3. **KSHAMA** - Forgiveness and Tolerance
4. **NYAYA** - Justice
5. **NIRAPEKSHA** - Impartiality
6. **NIRASAKTA** - Detachment
7. **TAPASYA** - Meditative and Spiritual Powers
8. **APARAJITA** - Invincibility

9. **DANASHEEL** - Benevolence, Bestower of Prosperity on the World
10. **SAUNDARJYAMAYA** - Beauty
11. **NRITTYAJNA** - Best of dancers
12. **SANGITAJNA** - Best of singers
13. **NEETIBADI** - Honesty
14. **SATYABADI** - Truth
15. **SARVAGNATA** - Mastery of all arts, such as poetry, drama, and painting
16. **SARVANIYANTA** - Control of all

Thus, the beauty of Lord Jagannath is not limited to outer form only, although He is given the best of dresses and decorations, and His veshas are changed at least six times a day.

He is the Beauty spread throughout the culture of Orissa. The arts of Orissa are like His divine maid-servants and their lustre only makes His black face shine more.

It is a fact that Odissi dance and music are achieving international acclaim today and making Jagannath Puri known world-wide. Young masters of traditional arts, such as HATHA YOGA and SOLA KAMA, are receiving national recognition.

That all the arts of Orissa are blossoming today is a sign of His Grace and a part of His Glory.

#### 9. **KARUNA BRAHMA** - BRAHMA as COMPASSION, TOLERANCE.

A common belief among people of Puri is that Lord Jagannath is all-forgiving, whereas Lokanath Shiva of the big Lokanath Temple of Puri will quickly punish. If one forgets a vow to Lord Shiva, for example, forgetting to distribute 200 Rupees of a sweet called KHAJA on MAHASHIVARATRI night, a snake will come to remind him! Thus people are sometimes afraid to go to Lokanath Temple.

But Lord Jagannath always excuses. He is called PATITA PAVANA, "savior of the fallen." It is said that if one sits inside JAGAMOHAN of the temple for twenty-one days, he will be healed of any incurable disease.

The greatest quality of God is tolerance for all, according to Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. Only in Jagannath Puri can all eat temple PRASAD together, even from the same plate, without fear of sin.

Taking Lord Jagannath's MAHAPRASAD is universal brotherhood put into practice. It is the highest type of relationship man can have, that is, "heart to heart, God to God," in the words of Sri Sathya Sai Baba. The colors of the deities' faces represent the colors of all the races of the world family, namely, black, white, and yellow.

At a time when the whole world is being fragmented by all kind of divisions of caste, creed, color, and sex, Lord Jagannath stands alone, like a silent reminder that God is one.

#### 10. **APARUPA BRAHMA** - FORMLESS BRAHMA.

Lord Jagannath is both in form, AKARA, and beyond form, NIRAKARA. He is beyond man's wildest imagination, description, or definition. He is beyond our knowledge and our emotions. In every sense He is beyond our grasp. He is limitless Spirit. In PADMA PURANA, Sri Krishna said,

"MADA BHAKTRA JATRA GAYANTI,  
TATRA TISTAMI NARAD."

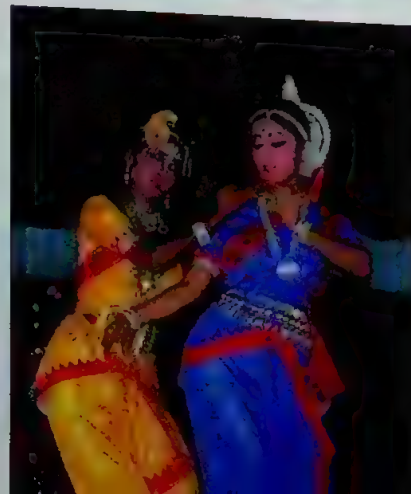
"I do not live in VAIKUNTHA  
or DWARAKA,  
But where My devotees sing  
and remember Me,  
I am there."

The last days of poet Balaram Das, one of the PANCHAKSAKHA poets of the 15th century, reflect this truth. After a life in Puri, he was forced by old age to return to his village on the banks of Kushabhadra River in Puri District.

But the intense desire for one more darshan of Lord Jagannath overpowered him. So he set out with a cane and water pot to walk to Puri. But when he reached the bank of the river, he fell senseless.



# PURI BEACH FESTIVAL







*The Sea Beach Dance Festival of Puri celebrates all the arts of Orissa. Here students of Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra enact excerpts from GEETA GOVINDA, which immortalizes in song and dance the love of Radha and Krishna.*





There as he lay dying, both Lord Jagannath and mother Lakshmi appeared before him, telling him, "Do not limit us to the four walls of a temple." Receiving their blessings, the old man died.

This place is today known as BALARAM GADI, or GUPTA SHREEKSHETRA, "the mystic Puri" and attracts pilgrims from far and wide.

#### 11. **KALA BRAHMA** - TIMELESS BRAHMA

To look at Lord Jagannath defeats time. Minutes become timeless. What was past, what will happen tomorrow, all is forgotten.

Lord Jagannath defeats history. He is both very old and very new. Whether made originally of stone or wood, He has always existed in some form, as KALA BRAHMA, and is today manifesting these powers for one and all on the eve of the 21st century.

This power to grant MOKSHA, or liberation from endless rebirths into the world, is His greatest Grace. To see Him, one forgets the world.

"God is one, world is zero," as Bhagavan Sathya Sai Baba says. "Only one who is the embodiment of Truth has the power to grant this Truth, only one who is the embodiment of Love, of Peace, of Dharma has the power to grant them."

Lord Jagannath, is the embodiment of eternal SANATANA DHARMA, which was, is, and will forever be. As long as the cultural traditions of Orissa continue to uphold these sacred values, they too can never die out.

#### 12. **DARU BRAHMA** - BRAHMA in FORM, specifically Neem wood.

In RIG VEDA, the word for wood, DARU, was used to indicate the material out of which the universe, or JAGAT, was made. Jagannath in DARU BRAHMA form was this whole world substance.

Even today, at the time of cutting the wood for the new deities, this DARU is considered sacred. To touch it is the same as touching the form of Lord Jagannath; both can grant liberation. Before

the chosen Neem tree is cut, a snake always appears and guards it. Puja is done to the tree and BHOGA offered, just as is done in the temple. The snake then leaves and the tree is cut.

The murtis of Lord Jagannath are found in many temples of India and all over the world. However, only the murti of Jagannath Temple is called DARU BRAHMA. All homes of Puri have small Jagannaths, but none look like the original DARU BRAHMA of the temple.

God appears in deity form to attract man to serve and worship Him. One who has enough faith sees God manifest in a rock or pillar as God is everywhere, and in everything. In the 1800's, British travellers to Puri wrote only of seeing "a very ugly, black and frightening God," but one must have the eyes to see.

Worldly eyes can never behold the Infinite. Lord Jagannath is definitely not like us. His form is like no other in this world. It is arresting. Like a magnet, it draws us. Like a divine magician, it mesmerizes us. It makes us stop and think.

The legend of the search of Bidyapati for BRAHMA may or may not have any historical basis, but it is certainly true on the deepest spiritual level. In this sense, all who come to Puri for darshan of Lord Jagannath are BIDYAPATIS.

It is said that when King Indradyumna's messenger Bidyapati came to Puri, he got four BRAHMAS without seeing this mysterious VIGRAHA itself. He experienced peace, the SABDA BRAHMA sound of the deep ocean. He lost his worldly senses and merged in godly thoughts, or JNANA BRAHMA.

He saw the MAHAPRASAD that was cooked without any fire and left daily, and he smelled its divine fragrance, that is, AGNI BRAHMA. Everywhere in Puri he had a feeling of a formless Presence, or APARUPA BRAHMA.

Yet he had still not seen the Divinity Himself. Upon finally gazing upon the lustrous VIGRAHA



*Not only Odissi dance and the lovely sea beaches, but also the temple of Lord Jagannath today draws pilgrims from all over the world.*





of NILA MADHAVA, he got four more BRAHMAS. He felt the divine love of God, PREMA BRAHMA, and the Lord's compassion on him for giving him this rare chance, KARUNA BRAHMA.

On seeing the beautiful dark blue form of four-armed NILA MADHAVA, he was overwhelmed by the beauty of God, SAUNDARJYA BRAHMA. He became wonderstruck when the divine lustre spread to fill the whole sky with a soft blue radiance, BYOMA BRAHMA.

On leaving Puri, Bidyapati received the last four BRAHMAS of Lord Jagannath. He himself felt this divine life force within him, BRAHMA. In his consciousness, he was now aware of the supreme truth of PARAMA BRAHMA.

In his own life he was no longer attached to the transitory world, but was absorbed in KALA BRAHMA, the timeless Jagannath. And in his hands was a small murti of the DARU BRAHMA, who had captured his heart.

Jagannath Puri is truly one of those rare sacred places of spiritual transformation. To come to Puri is to reclaim our ancient heritage, our eternal values, the SANATANA DHARMA for the whole world.

Where once foreigners came to invade and plunder, now they come to learn and worship.

It was once said that Lord Jagannath is Orissa, and Orissa is Lord Jagannath. Today this is no longer adequate to express the divine phenomenon that is happening here. Jagannath is the world; the world is Jagannath.

As the ashram of Sri Sathya Sai Baba is in Puttaparti, so is Jagannath Temple in Puri soon to become, a center of world pilgrimage.

Lord Jagannath, the divine magician, has the power to awaken us from our sleep of material existence so that we can return to Him in the spiritual world, the ultimate reality.

A small temple town of not more than 100,000 people, Puri appears as an insignificant dot on a world map. However, the consciousness that is Puri, the consciousness that is Lord Jagannath, is now making itself felt in the hearts and minds of people all over the world.

The next few years will reveal the role Puri is to play in the great unfolding of "His story."

*Opposite: Bhaktas lose themselves in DARU BRAHMA, the formless God who has taken form.*





Mr. Somanath Khuntia, M.A., B. Ed., is a widely-published poet and writer on Jagannath Temple of Puri, Orissa, India. He is also a priest who serves in the temple. His humorous short stories based on the social life of Orissa have been published in numerous magazines and journals of India, and abroad. He is a regular contributor to the Orissa newspaper. His humorous column, entitled "LAGHUPAKA" meaning "Easily Digested" concerns the social life of Orissa in general.

An educator in a government teacher training institute, he has also written a collection of stories for children, based on the actual miracles that have occurred in the temple of Lord Jagannath down through the centuries.

Mr. Khuntia is a regular radio and T.V. commentator and one of the host announcers on All-India Radio and Television for the annual Car Festival in Puri. During the past twenty years, Mr. Khuntia has guided many visitors from India and abroad around the temple, including diplomats, palm leaf scholars, foreign tour groups, and writers like Gunter Grass.

Among his more serious writings are the following books: LEELAS OF LORD JAGANNATH, published in U.S.A., 1990, THE TEMPLE OF LORD JAGANNATH, published in Bombay, 1996, THE PUJA SYSTEM OF JAGANNATH TEMPLE, 1997. Anyone wishing to contact the author may write to the following address:

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Above: Little children delight in making miniature chariots which they pull behind the big Rathes on Rath Yatra day.



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To record the traditions of such a rich culture seemed an impossible task at its inception nine years ago. But by the blessings of Lord Jagannath and Sri Sathya Sai Baba, it has indeed become a reality.

If you would like to correspond with the author on the subject of this book or for other books and video documentaries by the same author, write to:

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c/o Somanath Khuntia  
Manikarnika Sahi, Puri - 752001, Orissa.

Other books by the author:

Leelas of Lord Jagannath, 1990 (USA)  
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The Puja System of Jagannath Temple, 1997.

## **Video Documentaries available:**

Festivals of Puri  
Puri, a Music Video  
Introduction to an Ancient Land  
(a travel documentary on Orissa)

## **Neta Puja**

## **Artists of Orissa Series**

(Gotipua Dances, Odissi Dance, Sola Kama, and Stone Carving)



*Above and back cover: As twilight comes, the Rath  
pause for a night's rest on the Grand Road of Puri.*







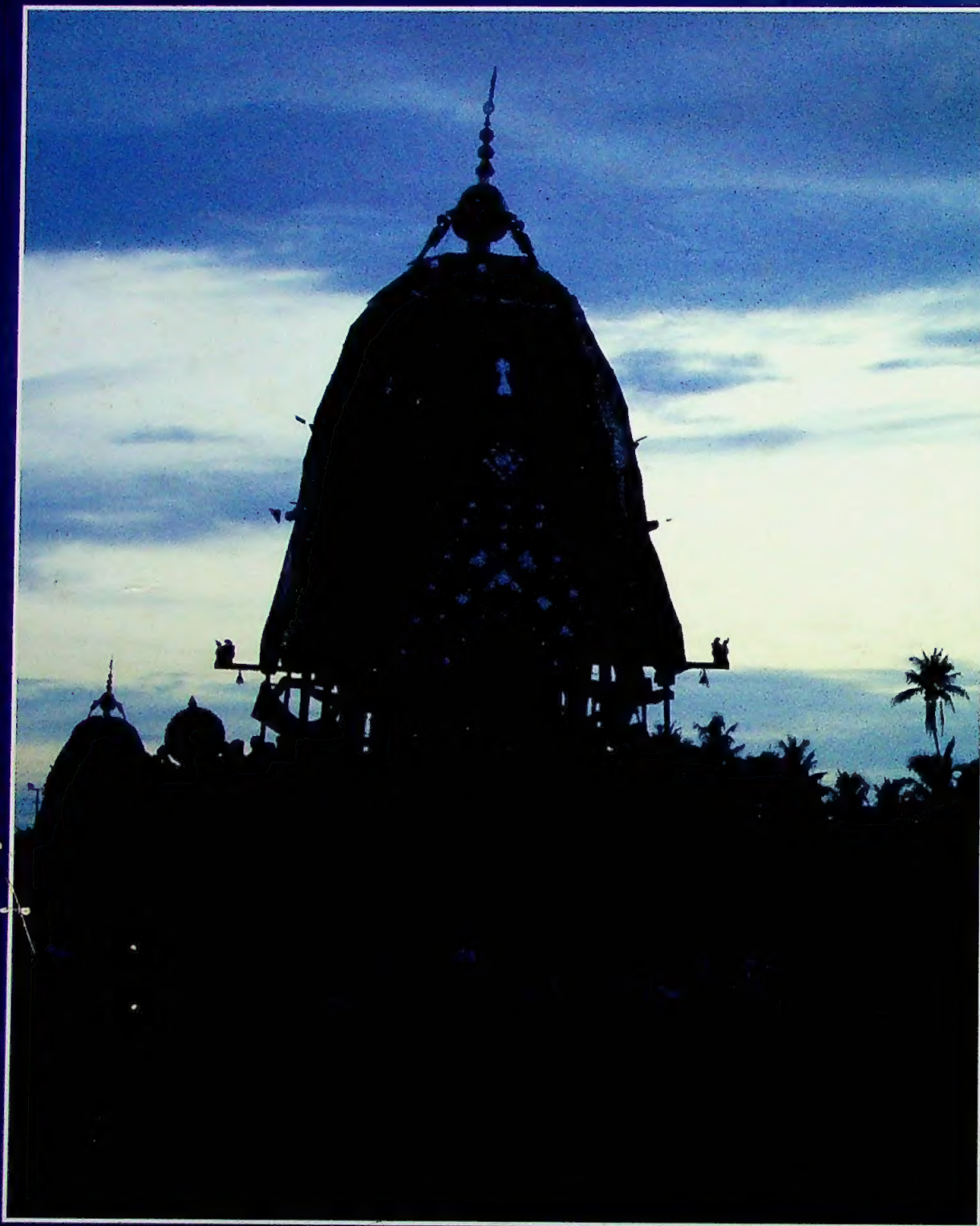












Oh tired mind  
Let us go to Puri  
to see the round-eyed  
Jagannatha

We will wash our eyes  
In the place which is  
In the middle of the conch

